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ENTERED AT THE POST OFFICE AT NEW YORK, N. Y., AS SECOND CLASS MATTER.

Vol. VII.

Published Every
Two Weeks.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., February 11, 1880.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$2.50 a Year.

No. 87

The Scarlet Captain; OR, The Prisoner of the Tower. A STORY OF HEROISM.

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AUTHOR OF "SILVER SAM," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE FALSE SON OF A TRUE RACE.

"He stood alone—a renegade
Against the country he betrayed."
—BYRON.

By the blue waters of the far-famed Adriatic Sea, lies Dulcigno's town, a small village only yet boasting as strong a tower as can be found from Otranto's strait to the Gulf of Venice.

Right on the border-land between Montenegro and Albania the town is situated, and at the time of which we write, the summer of 1876, it was the scene of bustle and confusion.

Nominally subject to Turkey, yet in reality almost independent in their mountain fastnesses, the stirring events which were shaking the Moslem Empire to its very center—the de-thronement and death—assassination, to speak plainly—of one sultan, and the ascent to the blood-stained chair of state of another, affected the hardy mountaineers of Montenegro but little; yet when the new ruler of the old Ottoman empire talked blandly of reform and of equal rights to all his subjects, be they followers of the Prophet or Christians, but at the same time began to mass an army in the Christian provinces, signs of open revolt appeared.

With the army came the tax-gatherers, and the Turks talked loudly of the tribute due to the new sultan.

All the mountain land was inflamed; the spark of war might be lighted at any moment.

The town of Dulcigno had been selected by the Turks as the head-quarters of a powerful force.

It was plain that the insolent Moslems intended by this display of guns to awe the stubborn mountaineers into submission.

From Dulcigno the Turkish host threatened the very heart of Montenegro.

And now, having thus briefly depicted the stormy aspect of the times, we will proceed at once to our story.

A short half-mile from the town, northward, by the shore of the rock-bound coast, the strong tower of Dulcigno reared its gray walls, keeping watch and ward over land and sea.

Half-way between the tower and the town was a small inn, which displayed as its sign the grinning head of a large black bear.

To all travelers who journeyed along the winding way, following the shore of the sounding sea from Dulcigno to Antivari and Cattaro, the inn of the Black Bear's Head was well known, being noted for its good cheer.

The shades of night were falling fast over rocky defile, sandy shore and ever-rolling wave.

Three men sat at a table placed under a huge cork-tree, a short distance from the ancient inn.

Three men as unlike each other as they possibly could be!

The first was a tall, fierce-eyed, sullen-faced



HIGH UP ON A BEETLING CRAG, TWO MEN WATCHED THE TURKISH HOST ENTANGLED IN THE MOUNTAIN DEFILES.

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person of forty, dressed, apparently, in a Turkish garb, for little of his costume could be seen, as he was closely enveloped in one of the peculiar garments common to the Albanians, a huge woolly mantle, made of horse-hair, with a cape attached, and termed a capote.

The second was a short, thick-set man, gross in face and form. He was dressed in the loose, baggy uniform, which the Turks borrowed from their allies, the French, at the time of the Crimean war. He had red hair, cropped tight to his head, huge red whiskers, and the little eyes which twinkled above his fat cheeks were as blue as the waters of the smiling Adriatic.

A chief of note was this personage in the Moslem host. He commanded a division of Bashi Bazouks, as the irregular cavalry of the Turks is termed, and the camel-driver Prophet, great Mahomet, never had a more ardent worshiper—in public—than the stout soldier, Ofian Agan, as the warrior was termed.

But, surely, no Turk ever wore such a grin; no turbaned believer ever had such a capacity for strong liquor.

Write the name again then: O'Flanagan, Phelim O'Flanagan as he was christened, years ago, by old Father O'Toole, the parish priest of Ballingary, county Munster.

As a private soldier during the Crimean war O'Flanagan had marched away from his native hills. At the end of the strife he had accepted the liberal offers made by the Turks to induce Europeans to enter their service, and now, behold him after the lapse of years, transformed into a follower of the Prophet, his Celtic name transmogrified, he himself wedded to six wives, but in reality the same blundering, warm-hearted son of Erin as in the old days, when a strong arm, a stout heart and a "perty black-thorn sthick" had comprised his earthly possessions.

The third one of the three was a little, wiry-looking fellow, habited in the Turkish uniform, and bearing the emblems which showed that he held the rank of colonel. He was called Hassan El Moola.

Although it is one of the articles of the Moslem creed that true believers shall not indulge in the juice of the grape, yet a bottle of the thin, native Albanian wine was before the three men and they were doing ample justice to it, the Irish-Turk, Ofian Agan, particularly.

The three had met evidently by appointment.

A few hearty drafts of the wine taken, the conversation began.

"Well, and how goes everything?" asked the tall man, whose name we have not yet given, but who was evidently the master-spirit of the three.

"I for one have obeyed your orders to the letter," Hassan answered. "My regiment is in possession of the tower and I have diligently strengthened the defenses so that I feel confident I can hold it against ten thousand men."

"Be the bones of St. Patrick!" cried the Irish-Turk, vociferously, but his speech tinged with the "sweet brogue" native to the South of Ireland, which neither time nor toil had served to diminish in the least, "but it's meself that has done exactly as ye bid! My division is posted just this side of the Pass of Doura, an' some me b'yes—wilder divils the world never saw!—have discovered a goat-track over the mountains, so that if the rapscallions get wind of our design and attempt to hould the pass ag'in' us we can flank them by means of the goat-track an' come down on their rear an' then bag the lot of them."

"Excellent!" the tall, dark man exclaimed. "All is as I could wish then, and to-night my plan culminates."

His two companions looked inquiringly at their leader. It was plain that they were not in his confidence.

He noticed the look and understood the tenor of the questions which they wished to ask.

"Before midnight you shall know all," he said. "I am playing for a great stake and I have left no means untried to win. Hassan, is the suit of apartments in the tower prepared, for the lady?"

"It is."

"She will come as night thickens. Even now she is detained at the outpost by my orders under pretense that her passports are not correct. I do not wish her to see where she is going until it is too late for her to retreat."

"An' is it fair, general, dear, to ax who is the lady?" questioned the Irishman, anxious as a woman.

"Catherine Belina, Countess of Scutari!"

"Bedad! ye fly at high game!" the Irishman exclaimed.

"Yes, else why should I take all this trouble? The lands of Scutari lie between us and Montenegro; bold and warlike mountainers are these Scutari men, and whether they join hands with Nicholas of Montenegro, or ally themselves with us, depends upon the result of my plans. If I succeed, the way lies open into the very heart of Montenegro. I know these mountain men well. I am of their race, although I have forsown my kin and clime and become a renegade, a man without a country. Come! the night draws on. Catherine, the fairest woman

that ever breathed this mountain air, will soon be here. We must to the tower to receive her."

The three paid their score, mounted their horses and set out.

CHAPTER II.

THE AMERICAN AND THE UNKNOWN.

HARDLY had the figures of the three persons disappeared in the distance when another mounted man came up the road from the town. A tall, handsome fellow this time, evidently a mountaineer, for he was dressed after the Albanian fashion. A scarlet velvet jacket and vest, richly trimmed; a kilt-like skirt reaching to the knee, confined at the waist by a scarf of many hues, through the folds of which a pair of silver-mounted revolvers were thrust. The muscular legs of the stranger were protected by leggins of velvet cloth, held in their place by greaves of metal. Upon his head he wore the national head-dress of the mountaineer, a scarlet scull-cap, around which a light shawl was twisted, turban fashion, and hanging from his shoulders was the ever-common horse-hair mantle, the capote. In addition to the pistols, a saber was buckled to his side.

A fine specimen of the hardy Montenegrine mountaineer was the horseman, with his long, oval face, fringed by flowing locks of dark-brown hair; his eyes deep hazel in hue, and bold and true in their expression. After the fashion of the mountain men, his beard was closely shaven, but he retained the mustache, the silken ends of which half hid his firm, resolute mouth.

The man was young, not yet thirty; but in his calm, thoughtful face could be read a resolution and wisdom seldom gifted to one of his years.

As he rode slowly up to the door of the inn, the eyes of the horseman were fixed upon the dark outlines of Dulcigno tower, rising dim and threateningly in the distance.

"What is the meaning of all these warlike preparations?" he muttered, communing with himself, "and why have they taken so much pains to fortify the old tower? Ismail Bey, too, the red-handed slaughterer, is here in person, and his presence always means mischief. You tower holds a secret which must be mine before the rising of another sun."

The horseman dismounted, seated himself at the table under the oak tree, and rapped upon it.

A pretty, bright-eyed girl from the inn answered the summons.

"A bottle of wine," said the horseman, tossing a gold-piece upon the table.

"Yes, sir, immediately," said the maid, with a courtesy and a coquettish smile, retreating to the inn again. It was plain that the lass was an arrant flirt.

The stranger laughed to himself; despite his sober face, he had an eye for a pretty woman.

"The girl may afford me some information," he mused.

The maid returned with the wine and a drinking-glass, and also the change for the horseman's gold-piece.

"Yon gray pile is the tower of Dulcigno, if I mistake not," the stranger half queried.

"Yes, sir," replied the girl, quite willing to enter into a flirtation with the handsome fellow.

"Garrisoned now, I believe, by Turkish troops?"

"Yes! sir; the Bashi Bazouks of Hassan El Moola; terrible fellows they are, too, sir, but not half so bad as Ofian Agan's rascals."

And just at this point the conversation was suddenly interrupted.

Forth from the inn came a young, dashy-looking fellow; no Turk or Albanian, nor yet a Muscovite, but an unmistakable Anglo-Saxon, booted and spurred, and dressed in a rough traveling costume; well armed, too, revolvers and saber and a repeating rifle slung across his back.

"I thought that I could not be mistaken!" he exclaimed, advancing straight to the horseman with outstretched hands; "although I might have expected to meet you somewhere in this region, yet I did not think that I should so soon have the pleasure."

"Ah, you remember me?" quoth the horseman, hastily, and with a warning look in his eyes.

"Oh, yes, your—"

"Captain!" cried the stranger, quickly. "I have been promoted since we met in Paris."

"Yes? I am glad to hear of it."

The girl, understanding that her presence was no longer required, discreetly withdrew, leaving the two friends, for such in truth they were, to converse without restraint.

Robert Lauderdale, the new-comer was called; a son of the great western republic, far across the rolling waters, a native of the State of Mississippi, and a brave and able officer of the Confederate army during the war of the rebellion.

Six months previous to the time of which we write, at the Grand Hotel in Paris he had made the acquaintance of the horseman. Both being about the same age, with tastes in common, the two had become quite intimate.

"The times are troubous now, and I am on Turkish soil," the horseman explained. "I was afraid lest, unconsciously, you might betray me. The Bashi Bazouks would not be apt to show me much mercy."

"Is war then declared?"

"Not yet, but it is liable to be at any moment."

"I am in time, then."

"You intend to take a part in the struggle?"

"Am I not a soldier of fortune?" demanded the American. "An exile from my own land, I hope to win fame and wealth here in the old world."

"The Turk pays well, and European officers are in demand," the horseman observed quietly.

"No Turk buys my sword!" Lauderdale cried, quickly. "The Christian mountaineers of Montenegro shall be my comrades. The son of a free soil, I sympathize with the men who struggle for liberty against a tyrant!"

The stranger quietly extended his hand which the American clasped warmly.

"You shall have my influence if it can serve you," the horseman said.

"Your influence must be all powerful, your—"

"Captain!" exclaimed the horseman, warningly. "You must not forget; I am only a simple captain."

"Yes, but Captain what? Suppose I were questioned?"

"Well, Captain anything—Captain Scarlet if you like," responded the other, with a smile, glancing at his attire as he spoke, the prevailing hue of which was scarlet.

"Yes; Captain Scarlet or Scarlet Captain, eh? like a romance of the olden time; and then, as a partisan leader—the role which I presume you will play here—you will need another title, something striking. Suppose we say the Slasher of Scutari, as I presume the field of your operations will be on the Montenegrine side of Lake Scutari."

"The title will answer admirably!" the Captain—for so in future we will term the horseman—replied, laughing.

"We'll drink success to the Scarlet Captain!"

A stray glass had been left upon the table; gayly they quaffed the thin wine.

"Is yonder gray castle the tower of Dulcigno?" Lauderdale asked, his eyes falling upon the ancient keep.

The Captain nodded.

"The very place I was in search of! Before midnight that tower will hold two more precious jewels."

"Indeed! Explain."

"A month ago, at Baden-Baden, I made the acquaintance of a most charming girl, Alexina Petrovitch by name, and foster-sister to Catherine Belina, the Countess of Scutari. I also became acquainted with the countess at the same time, but, although she is a most beautiful girl, there is altogether too much of the grand dame about her to suit me. I am an adventurer, with nothing but my sword, for my ancestral acres, the old plantation in Mississippi, are so heavily encumbered that I count them as nothing. Alexina is an orphan, without fortune, so we are exactly suited to each other. My courtship was progressing splendidly, when the news came of the death of the old count, Catherine's father, and she was summoned home. My lady-love of course went with her, and I followed. I saw a chance to kill two birds with one stone—pursue my suit with the charming Alexina and at the same time, being on the spot where the coming war was likely to transpire, I could take part in it."

"But what has the castle to do with these two ladies, for, as I understand, they are the jewels to whom you have referred?"

"Exactly. In the tower of Dulcigno the countess is to meet the executors of her father's estate. Through some misunderstanding the party is detained at one of the Turkish outposts, but I was assured by the officer in charge that they would reach the tower just after nightfall. It is necessary for me to gain entrance to the tower, for I must see Alexina; she has no idea that I am here."

"I'll go with you!" the Captain exclaimed, abruptly. "I am anxious to learn why the Turks have taken so much pains to fortify the tower."

"Capital! I can easily gain admittance; I have scraped an acquaintance with a Bashi Bazouk leader, one Skipton Pasha, who has promised to aid me."

CHAPTER III.

THE WILL OF THE SCUTARI MEN.

In the old tower a suit of apartments had been fitted up with unusual care, and to them the Countess of Scutari and her foster-sister, the gentle Alexina, had been conducted immediately upon their arrival.

They had been at the Turkish outposts until about eight o'clock, and then, with a thousand apologies for the delay, had been conducted straight to the tower.

The countess, coming with all possible speed, upon learning of the death of her father, had not staid for an escort, and was accompanied

only by her foster-sister, two maids and the old priest, Father Ivan, who had brought the news of her parent's death.

A collation was prepared for the party immediately upon their arrival and the countess was informed that as soon as she had satisfied her hunger the executor of her father, the late Count Michael, would wait upon her.

Catherine wondered somewhat that the strong tower of Dulcigno, garrisoned by Turkish troops, should be selected by the representative of her father's people as the place of meeting—the more, too, that the old priest was totally unable to tell her who the party was.

The repast ended, the countess informed the chief servant, a swarthy-browed Turk, that she was prepared to give audience to the representative of the men of Scutari.

Behold the two girls, then, in the great room of the tower, waiting the approach of the messenger.

Catherine Belina, Countess of Scutari, was as fair a woman as ever the Montenegrine sun had shone upon—tall and straight, a very queen in bearing, with great blue eyes, lustrous with ever-varying light; a face, pure Greek in its outline and as superbly modeled as though Dame Nature, jealous of the antique statues, of the olden-time sculptors, had resolved, in this daughter of a modern age, to show how far living beauty could put to blush the perfection and trick of art.

One fault alone in the face—the proud and haughty expression which was ever written there.

Descended from one of the oldest families in Europe—boasting blood purer and more noble than the life-stream circling within the veins of many a crowned monarch, it was little wonder that the beautiful girl, fair as Venus, should also be as proud as Juno.

Many a noble gentleman, great in the council of statesmen, or else boasting a brilliant military fame, had sought to win favor in the eyes of the Montenegrine countess, but one and all had failed.

No suitor yet, no matter how great his name, how eager his suit, could boast that he had ever caused the heart of Catherine Belina to thrill at his presence.

"I seek a hero—a master," she was wont to say; "no common mortal for me!"

Alexina, her foster-sister, on the contrary, was as gentle and as lively as Catherine was severe and grave. A laughing, black-eyed beauty, small in stature but plump as a partridge, round in face as an apple, sparkling with wit, ever gay, it was not strange that she had captivated the wandering fancy of the young American adventurer, Robert Lauderdale; and this fair child of the blue Adriatic loved the bold and dashing stranger from the far New World, across the briny seas, the man who frankly said that his sword was his wealth, and, like the knights of old, he would carve out a fortune with it, or die in the attempt.

"Faint heart never won fair lady!" saith the proverb, and in this case the old saw seemed to be true, for Lauderdale, by his boldness, won favor in the bright black eyes which never before had smiled lovingly upon mortal man.

Catherine dismissed the attendants and signified that she was ready to receive the envoy.

Into the chamber then stalked a tall and stalwart form. The fashion of the stranger's dress was hidden by the huge capote which enveloped him from head to foot, but upon his brow he wore the turban of the Turk.

Familiar and yet not familiar was the face of the man, and, for a moment, the Countess of Scutari gazed upon him with a puzzled look, and then, confident that she was not mistaken in the belief which had seized upon her, with a look of scorn she addressed him:

"Years have passed since I have seen your face, and yet I think that I can call you by name if I choose," she said, bitter scorn in every intonation.

"You can," the stranger responded, briefly and coldly, standing well the lightning flashing from the scornful woman's eyes.

"John Belina, the Scutari boy, who forsook the hills of Montenegro and the homes of his people to join the cruel, turbaned Turk!"

"Right; John Belina, your cousin, who was driven like a dog from your father's house because he dared to forget that you were the Countess of Scutari, and sought to woo and win you!" the man replied, a bitter expression in his voice. "But now, thanks to the will of the ever-living God, the tide of fortune has changed, and I, the outcast—the renegade—come to you as the messenger of the men of Scutari to make known to you their will."

"Their will!" cried Catherine, proudly; "and what is their will to me? Say rather that you come to know my pleasure, and, as the messenger of the Scutari men, bear back to them my commands!"

"And are the mountaineers of Montenegro children that they should bow to a woman's words?" retorted the renegade, coldly.

This John Belina was the horseman whom we described in our first chapter holding deep converse with the two Bashi Bazouk leaders.

"Say your say, sir, as quickly and as briefly

as possible!" exclaimed Catherine, flaming into sudden anger.

"Your father, Michael, count of Scutari, died one month ago, and, being great in wisdom, he foresaw that in the near future the Christian provinces owing allegiance to the Turk, would be convulsed by a mighty struggle, and seeing that the Scutari domain, Montenegro's buckler against the Turk, or the Turk's guard against Montenegro, must take sides either with one or the other, or else be ground to pieces between the two, and knowing also that a woman's weak hand was unfitted to sway the destinies of Scutari in such an hour, decreed in his last will and testament, with the consent and approval of the elders of his people, that you, his daughter and sole heir, being a woman, could not be expected to prove equal to the emergency, and that by the time you reach your twenty-first year you must have a husband or else the domain must go to the next male heir, your cousin. Mark stands in that light, but it was his hope and wish that by wedding that heir you might still remain Countess of Scutari, and yet give to his people a warrior's brain and hand to guide them through the threatening storm."

Catherine listened in utter amazement.

"My cousin Mark is a noble gentleman!" she exclaimed, heatedly; "he will never consent to force me to a union, and yet he will be a leader to my people."

"Your cousin Mark is dead—killed by an assassin's hand," the renegade replied, in his cold, passionless tones. "And I, John Belina, the outcast, lost to sight in the Turkish ranks, whom for years all have believed to be dead, am now the next of kin to you; I am the direct male heir. Within a week you are twenty-one. You must be married within that time or else lose your domain. You are here, prisoner in the strong tower of Dulcigno, guarded by my troops, and here you will remain husbandless—unless you consent to wed me in the interim—until you are twenty-one, and then the domain of Scutari comes to me through legal right."

"Oh! into what a snare have I fallen!" the countess exclaimed, in horror; "but you will not dare! When the truth is known all Europe will espouse my cause!"

"Dare, woman!" cried the false Montenegrine, sternly. "I have dared many things since I was forced by your father to fly my kin and clime. You know me as John Belina, the renegade, but the world knows me better as Ismail Bey, the Turkish general and the Pasha of Albania!" and as he spoke the renegade threw open the rough capote and revealed his rich Turkish dress—his breast covered with sparkling orders, rewards bestowed for many a daring deed.

And in truth Turkey's sultan had no better general than the renegade.

"By fair means or foul the domain of Scutari must be mine, and then your people will join hands with the Turks and we'll crush Montenegro beneath our iron heel. Remember! within one week you either become my bride or else Scutari is lost to you forever!"

And then the renegade turned upon his heel and stalked out of the apartment.

Too late Catherine saw the trap into which she had fallen; but, helpless as she was in the power of her cruel foe, what possible escape could there be!

CHAPTER IV.

A HUSBAND AT ANY PRICE.

"OH, where were my wits that I did not detect this snare?" the girl exclaimed, mad with rage.

"Who could have detected it or looked for such treachery?" Alexina cried.

"True! this man has planned all with a demon's cunning."

"Within six days you must be married or else lose your domain!" the foster-sister observed, thoughtfully.

"Yes, and see how cunningly this base renegade has planned. I am here a prisoner and he will take care that I shall not have the chance to wed any one but him. My father must have been mad when he made such a will."

"But supposing that you were at liberty, would you marry without caring for the man?" Alexina questioned, innocently.

"Silly girl can I not meet trick with trick?" Catherine cried, impatiently. "The will says that I must be married—must have a husband—but nothing more. How easy, then, to hire some poor fellow to wed me with the condition that he quit my sight the moment the ceremony is ended and never trouble me with his presence more!"

"That could be," Alexina observed, thoughtfully.

"Yes, certainly; what is there to prevent it, if I only had my liberty?"

"Might we not bribe one of the attendants to allow us to escape?"

"Small hope of that, for this stern and wily renegade has doubtless chosen his men well."

"I have it!" exclaimed the foster-sister, gleefully.

fully, and clapping her hands together, child-like with joy.

"A plan?"

"Yes; Father Ivan is with us and obedient to your slightest command; bribe one of the attendants to wed you; the father will perform the service; you will have a husband and your domain be saved."

Catherine shook her head.

"I doubt the plan succeeding; remember the faces of the men; grim, stolid Turks, every one."

"And if one would consent, would you really wed him?" Alexina asked, earnestly.

"Yes, in a moment, provided he agreed to the condition," the countess answered, firmly.

Alexina glanced around her cautiously, then came close to Catherine.

"There is a way, if you will accept it," she whispered.

"I am desperate and will not stop at anything to defeat this vile plot of which I am the victim," the countess replied, firmly.

"You remember the gentleman who paid me so much attention at Baden-Baden?"

"The American?"

"Yes; Robert Lauderdale—he is here—concealed in yonder closet," and the girl pointed to an arched recess, heavily wainscoted, wherein a massive door appeared. "A private staircase leads from the closet to the main court of the castle. My gentleman has contrived to make a friend of one of the Bashi Bazouk captains, and so was enabled to get into the tower."

"And can we not escape by this secret staircase?" asked Catherine, anxiously.

"No, that is impossible, for the stairway leads directly into the main court, and every outlet is strongly guarded. The American is dressed like a mountaineer, and was brought into the tower with a skin of wine upon his shoulder, and so was able to deceive the sentry."

"But what is your plan, since it is not possible to escape?"

"You want a husband, and one willing to marry anybody—"

"Surely you would not give me your lover?"

"Oh, no!" cried Alexina, quickly. "I want him myself, and dearly as I love you, such a sacrifice, I fear, would be too much; but the American has a companion—"

"Ah! another American?"

"I do not know; I only noticed that there was some one with him—a handsome fellow enough, but muffled to the chin in a huge capote."

Catherine's proud lip curled just a little at the description.

"Handsome or ugly, it matters not to me, long as he is willing to do my bidding and abide by the conditions," she said, slowly, all the proud blood of her ancient race in her veins revolting at the trial.

"I'll speak to my gentleman at once, and explain the matter to him."

Alexina hastened to the closet, threw open the massive door and beckoned the two men, lurking within the recess, to enter the apartment.

Lauderdale and the unknown Captain advanced. The American had donned a mountaineer's garb similar to the one worn by the stranger.

Briefly, Alexina explained the situation, while the countess quietly seated herself at the table never even deigning to cast a look at the man whom she intended to use as a weapon to strike a blow at the cruel and wily Ismail Bey.

A peculiar look appeared upon the pale face of the Captain when he learned the nature of the service required of him, and it was with careful eyes that he scrutinized the beautiful but haughty face of the Montenegrine countess.

"If my poor services can aid the lady, right gladly do I place them at her command," he said, when the foster-sister had finished her story, speaking in the slow and measured style so natural to him.

"Instruct Father Ivan, as to the duties required of him," the countess said, and then as Alexina hastened to apprise the priest, she addressed the stranger.

"Approach, sir."

The man advanced until he stood at Catherine's side! his face quiet, even stolid, no trace of admiration upon it at the wondrous beauty of the woman whom he was about to serve after so strange a fashion.

"You understand the conditions, sir?"

"I believe so."

"It is to be but a marriage in name—the service I will richly requite once I am free. You pledge your honor as a gentleman never to claim the rights of a husband—you are a gentleman, I presume?"

"I hope so," the man replied, coldly.

"Your name?"

"Is that necessary?"

"Yes," she replied, imperiously.

"My comrade here, who knows me well, calls me the Scarlet Captain, sometimes, and sometimes the Slasher of Scutari."

"You are a robber then, like nearly all the Albanians?"

The Scarlet Captain.

"My enemies call me so," the man replied, in his quiet way.

"It makes no difference to me who or what you are, so long as you perform the service I require," Catherine observed, in her haughty style; "although, perhaps, it would have been more pleasant to me if you had been of noble blood."

"From one of the brothers Noah am I descended, but my family have never succeeded in discovering which one," the captain replied, with a grave face.

Catherine cast a quick glance at the man; she felt that she was well answered.

Alexina's return with the old priest put a stop to the conversation.

The worthy father was astonished, and vainly tried to dissuade Catherine from her resolve, but the resolution of the Montenegrean girl was not to be shaken.

"No, father!" she exclaimed, "at any cost I must and will baffle this vile plot of which I am the victim. John Belina, the renegade, or Ismail Bey, whichever he chooses to call himself, shall find that cunning as he thinks he is, he can be matched by a woman's wit!"

"But this man! do you know aught in regard to him?"

"No; nor do I care!" the countess cried, impatiently. "He is but a tool to serve my purpose. I am desperate and will not stop at anything to break the snare into which I have fallen."

The old priest rolled up his eyes in dismay; he would fain have reasoned the girl from her resolution, but he knew the iron race of Belina too well to further attempt it.

The priest prepared for the ceremony.

"Come, my children," he said.

The two knelt before him.

The ceremony commenced.

At a little distance Alexina clung to her lover's arm.

"Who is the gentleman?" she asked, curiously interested in the pale and handsome stranger.

"A man, every inch of him, as the haughty Catherine will find one of these days, or I miss my reckoning," the American replied.

The final words were spoken, and the Scarlet Captain, the Slasher of Scutari, as he called himself, and Catherine Belina were man and wife.

And hardly had the priest closed the missal when there was a loud outcry; the door leading to the secret staircase was burst violently open, and Ismail Bey, heading a large number of Bashi Bazouks, rushed into the apartment, naked sabers gleaming in their hands.

CHAPTER V.

SKIPTON PASHA.

AND now, in order that the reader may understand how it was that the two friends gained an easy entrance to the strongly-guarded tower of Dulcigno, we must retrace our steps.

Just as the evening shades were beginning to gather thick and heavy on the bosom of old Mother Earth, forth from the forest, near to the inn of the Black Bear's Head, came a manly form, well wrapped in a dark cloak and with a broad-brimmed hat pulled down over his eyes.

The stranger seated himself at the table under the cork tree, threw open the dark cloak, revealing the uniform of a Bashi Bazouk leader beneath, and pushed back the brigand-like hat from his brow.

A stout, jolly-looking fellow was this Turkish captain, but the head that sat upon the broad shoulders, with its curly yellow locks and clear blue eyes, clearly never belonged to a native-born follower of the Prophet, the great Mahomet.

As all the world knows, two-thirds of the Turkish officers are foreigners, and this dashing Bashi Bazouk leader, one of the biggest scampires in all the Moslem host, Skipton Pasha by name, was as well known in his native town in old Yorkshire, England, as the traditional town-pump itself.

Tom Skipton he had been called at home, and a wilder boy never plagued a schoolmaster.

He had run away from home and enlisted in the army, served three or four years, then quarreled with one of the petty officers and thrashed him soundly, deserted and sought service with the Turks.

And now, at the age of twenty-five, we find him transformed from plain Tom Skipton, the devil-may-care English boy, into Skipton Pasha, a Bashi Bazouk captain; but, just as big a "limb" as ever.

Since his command had been quartered in the neighborhood of Dulcigno, an excellent patron of the inn of the Black Bear's Head, the Bashi Bazouk captain had been, for a capital judge of good wine was he.

A few such patrons and old Mother Koola, as the Turkish woman who kept the inn was called, would have made her eternal fortune, provided they paid cash, which, as a rule, Skipton Pasha never did.

With Shakespeare's ancient Pistol he cried:

"Base is the slave that pays!"

Therefore a good round sum he owed the hostess of the inn for refreshments furnished.

Patience at last with Mother Koola ceased to be a virtue, and therefore, when, that afternoon, the Bashi Bazouk captain with his boon companions had swaggered up as usual and called for wine, in language strong and emphatic, if not refined, for the hostess had a tongue of her own, she told the gallant captain that she must first see the color of his money ere he could taste the quality of her liquor.

The captain assumed a lofty air, affected indignation that his word should be doubted, cried lustily that before nightfall she should be paid in full and then swaggered away with his nose in the air, as proud as though he were the Grand Turk himself.

To tell the truth there was far more steel than gold to the life of the Bashi Bazouks.

The Turkish sultan was an excellent paymaster but a little irregular, and it was often months between the visits of the officials charged with the cash for the payment of the soldiers.

Night had come and with it the Bashi Bazouk captain.

From the window of the inn a pair of bright black eyes had been anxiously watching for the approach of the dashing Skipton Pasha, for it was not alone the red wine of the inn of the Black Bear's Head that had attracted the Bashi Bazouk captain. Zelina, old Mother Koola's daughter, the pretty maid, whom, perchance, the reader will remember we described as serving the tall unknown with the liquid refreshment, was as full of natural coquetry as an egg is of meat, and as Skipton Pasha was a fine, tall fellow, not averse to the society of a pretty woman, a flirtation between the pair had been quite in order.

Hardly had the soldier seated himself at the table when the girl stole through the door of the inn and hastened to greet him.

"Where is thine aged parent?" quoth Skipton.

"Down in the cellar," replied the girl.

"I presume she expects me to settle with her to-night?"

"No, she don't," answered Zelina, quickly.

"No?"

"No, she says that she knows she will never get a copper of it."

The Bashi Bazouk laughed.

"It is astonishing how all my creditors come to think that way in a very short time."

"She is terribly angry, and threatens to do all sorts of dreadful things."

"Bah!" cried the gallant Pasha, in supreme contempt; "it is but noise. Upon my honor as a soldier I have done my best to raise the gold to pay the debt. I went to my brave and noble brother officers, and all Europe holds no better men; I explained to them the peculiar position in which I found myself. I told them, frankly, I love the charming daughter of the dame that keeps the inn of the Black Bear's Head"—and here the impudent fellow drew the giggling girl down upon his knee and imprinted a fond salute upon her pouting lips—"I owe the old woman money, and my course of true love will not run smooth until I pay up; gold I have not, therefore, comrades, help me!"

"And did they?" asked the girl, anxiously.

"Ah! hearts of gold! At once they turned their pockets inside out, but as there wasn't anything in them, I didn't take it."

"Oh! how dreadful!"

And then came a sudden interruption to this tender scene, for out from the door of the inn bounced the old woman, and up from the knee of her lover jumped the girl. She fled precipitately around the house, and in at the back door, leaving the gallant captain to face the coming tempest alone.

"Oho! You've come back, have you?" growled the dame, a brawny woman of uncertain age, stout in figure, ugly in face, and boasting a mustache upon her upper lip which would not have descredited a grenadier.

"I have," replied the Bashi Bazouk, rising and bowing as politely as though he were addressing a princess.

"And the money—the money you owe me?"

"Patience!" cried Skipton, with the air of an ambassador; "patience," he continued; "this is a matter that requires time."

"And you haven't got the money to pay me?" persisted the hostess, not at all appeased by the wily art of the soldier.

"No, not to-night, I grieve to say, but to-morrow—"

"Ah, to-morrow it will be the same story!" exclaimed the dame, angrily. "I know you soldiers, varlets, all of you!"

"Nay, touch me not so nearly!" plead Skipton, theatrically. "By the beard of the Prophet, I swear I am an honest man!"

"There are only two ways to settle the matter," declared the old woman, in a very business-like way.

"Two ways?"

"Yes; either pay me what you owe, or—"

"Or what?"

"What do you think of me?" and the virago squared herself, placed her arms "akimbo," and looked the soldier straight in the face.

"Well, really, this is a delicate question," Skipton was amazed.

"I have been called good-looking," the hostess observed, with an air of great complacency. "I have had three husbands already, and as I got along very well with them, I don't mind trying a fourth. You are just the kind of man I have been looking for. I've got the gold-pieces and can take good care of you. I'm much better suited to you than that little slip of a girl, the baggage."

The Bashi Bazouk was thunderstruck at the offer.

"Come, is it a bargain?" continued the dame. "It is a splendid chance for you. 'Tisn't every man gets such an offer."

"Really I—I must request you to excuse me," Skipton stammered, for once in his life completely astounded.

"Oho! and that's the way the wind is, eh?" yelled the old woman, in rage. "Well, now just listen to me; don't come 'round my inn after that baggage of a girl any more, or it will be the worse for you! Oh! you vile knave! if you dare to come to my house again I'll have you well thrashed!" And then the dame retreated to her castle, boiling over with indignation.

CHAPTER VI.

THE IRISH-TURK.

"Ah, they can't help it!" Skipton exclaimed, surveying himself with complacency after the dame's hasty retreat. "It's no use; they can't withstand this elegant figure."

The sound of horses' hoofs interrupted the meditations of the Bashi Bazouk and a cavalcade came filing past—a troop of Turkish horsemen, and in the center two young and beautiful girls.

It was the Countess of Scutari and her foster-sister, Alexina, on their way to the dark tower of Dulcigno.

Skipton recognized the ladies at once. Only a few short months before he had made the acquaintance of the charming Alexina at Baden-Baden, he being absent from his duties on a furlough at the time. The English-Turk possessed a susceptible heart, always was ready to fall in love with a pretty face on the slightest provocation.

Alexina, recognizing the good-looking officer, bowed graciously to him as she rode past. The Bashi Bazouk was on tiptoes at once.

"My head to a Messina orange!" he cried, "but they are bound for the old tower of Dulcigno. I heard to-day that some ladies were expected there to-night. Aha! a chance to push my suit with Alexina. She must be pretty well provided with the ducats, too, being the foster-sister of the Countess of Scutari. I can easily get into the castle."

The Bashi Bazouk captain had an eye to business. He twirled his mustache, and canting back his head, smiled knowingly.

She will never be able to withstand this elegant figure," he murmured. "I must see Ofian Agan at once, for his troop are quartered just outside the castle, and he probably knows all about the arrangements of the guards."

"Speak of Old Nick and he is pretty sure to appear," so the bare mention of the name of the portly captain seemed to conjure him up, for the Irish-Turk came riding along in the gloom.

Perceiving Skipton he dismounted, tied his horse to the nearest tree, and approached the young Englishman in a most mysterious manner.

"Whist, ye blaggard!" he commanded.

"What's the matter with you?" the Englishman asked. He and the Irish-Turk were old acquaintances.

"Bedad, ye're the very man I wanted to see!"

"Well, that's strange, for you're the very man I wanted to see."

"Tare an' ounds! Is that so?"

"Yes; your troop is camped just outside the old tower, isn't it?"

"Divil a bit of a lie in that."

"How about getting into the tower?"

"Phat do ye want in the tower, ye thafe of the world?"

"There is a lady there," replied Skipton, mysteriously.

The Irishman winked first one eye and then the other, significantly.

"Oh, ye divil ye! an' phat is that to ye?"

"I have a very urgent desire to get a few minutes' conversation with her."

"It's not the Countess of Scutari?"

"Oh, no; her foster-sister, Alexina Petrovitch."

"It's difficult, ye haythen Turk ye!"

"How so?"

"There's a sentinel at the gate an' divil a fut can ye get inside the walls widout the pass-words."

"Oh!" and the brow of Skipton contracted.

"But it's meself that's the b'y'e that can give ye that password."

"You can?" the young Bashi Bazouk exclaimed in delight.

"Sorra taste of a lie in that!"

"My dear captain, the esteem I feel for you passes all explanation."

"Oh, wait till a while ago!" Ofian Agan reported, again winking his little eyes in a man-

ner intended to be highly mysterious. "It's a bargain I have to propose to ye. Ye have a gurl at the castle beyond, an' I have wan here: do you mind?" and the Irishman pointed to the inn.

"The deuce you have!" and Skipton was visibly surprised, for it was plain the red-headed captain intended to poach on his preserves.

"Yes, sorr, as foine a slip of a gurl as can be found from here to the Black Say an' it's a mighty favorable eye she has for a gentleman about my size!"

The Englishman did not express in words the feelings that possessed him, just then; his policy was to wait.

"But the ould woman, ah!" and the Irishman opened his mouth wide in disgust.

"Oh, she don't like you, eh?"

"No, sorr; an' just bekase I owe her a few paltry coins for her sour wine, bad 'cess to the liquor! I merely drank it so as to get a chance to court the gurl."

"On, yes; I see."

"It's a pot of b'ilin' wather the ould jade threatens to douse me with if she catches me near her door ag'in!"

"Is it possible?"

"Yis, sorr, it is; an' I've an appointment wid the gurl to-night; but, bad 'cess to me, if I like to venture near the inn in me own proper person, do ye mind."

Skipton was in a quandary. It was plain from this frank confession that the coquettish Zelina had more than one string to her bow and all the time, too, he had fancied himself without a rival.

"Yes, I see," he said, after a pause; "the old woman is a regular tiger, and I've no doubt that she would be as good as her word."

"A bright idea has seized upon me!" suddenly announced Oflan Agan, "an' it's just this: the cloak and hat of yours—give them to me, an' in return I'll reveal to you the password so that you can git into the tower, an' once inside you can easily fool any questioners by saying that you are on the staff of Ismail Bey."

"Ismail Bey!" exclaimed Skipton, astonished.

"Yes, sorr, the commander-in-chief wid his staff will be at the tower to-night, an' wid so many strange officers about, you can easily manage to escape detection."

Skipton smiled; vengeance was within his grasp. This red-headed Irishman had dared to pay court to the fair but flighty Zelina, the girl whom he had fondly fancied was all his own. Oflan wanted his cloak and hat for a disguise. Muffled in the one and with the other pulled down over his eyes, the Irish-Turk would go to the inn; the enraged old woman would be sure to recognize the hat and cloak on the instant, and believing the wearer to be the man who had disdained her liberal offer, it was more than probable that his reception would be an extremely warm one.

"It's a bargain!" cried the Englishman, quickly, and stripping off the cloak and hat he gave them to Oflan Agan, receiving his red fez in return. "And now the password?"

"Albania!"

"Thanks; I'll be off at once; good luck to your wooing!"

"Oh, no fear of that!" cried the Irishman, confidently. "It's meself that's the b'ye for the ladies."

"Allons!" responded Skipton, hurrying away; but no further than the shelter of the wood did he go, for there he concealed himself to watch the fun which he felt sure would not be long in coming.

The Irishman wrapped himself up in the cloak, pulled the broad-brimmed hat down over his eyes, and then marched up to the door of the inn and knocked; confident in his disguise, he felt no fear of being recognized. As a stranger he intended to ask lodgings for the night.

The hostess within, from her post of vantage, a small window, closely latticed, a yard from the door, surveyed the person of the knocker and recognized the cloak and hat at once.

It did not take the angry dame long to guess the purpose of the intruder.

"He's after that little hussy!" she cried, in wrath, and then at once she summoned her servants.

Two stout Albanians were a part of her household—great rough fellows, mountaineers every inch.

The hostess and the two servants armed themselves with stout sticks, and when the chuckling Irishman, growing impatient, knocked again, out they rushed and fell upon him with right good will.

Knocked down at the first assault, taken completely by surprise, never was a mortal better thrashed; but at last, getting out his pistols, a shot put his assailants to flight, and then, sore in every limb, the discomfited lover limped back to his camp, too much ashamed of his thrashing to raise an alarm.

And so it happened that the Irishman got well pummeled, Skipton Pasha got the password, securing entrance to the tower, which, half an

hour later, he revealed to the American, Lauderdale, as he had agreed, and thus the Scarlet Captain gained admittance to the fortalice and set at naught the skillfully-devised plan of the renegade.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LEAP FOR LIFE.

A STRIKING tableau indeed that scene in the grand chamber of the old tower of Dulcigno, when the renegade Montenegrean, the Turkish general, Ismail Bey, at the head of his sabered swordsmen, burst into the room.

But the marriage rites were ended, and Catherine Belina, Countess of Scutari, was a wedded woman.

The renegade had learned that two strangers had gained access to the castle. The same wily Turk who, for a handful of broad gold-pieces, had revealed the secret of the hidden staircase to the two adventurers, after seeing them safely up the winding way had hastened at once to the quarters of the Turkish commander, eager to earn a fresh reward by betraying the men who had paid him, careful, however, to conceal his own share in the matter.

Unable to understand why the strangers should seek the presence of the Countess of Scutari, yet apprehending that their mission boded no good to his deep-laid schemes, Ismail Bey had at once summoned his followers and hastened to surprise the daring pair.

It needed no ghost from the other world to reveal to John Belina what had taken place when at the head of his sabered followers he burst upon the scene. The priest, standing with book in hand; the kneeling pair before him—brilliant, beautiful Catherine Belina and the unknown adventurer who had called himself by so strange a title, the Scarlet Captain.

For a moment the renegade stood motionless, transfixed with surprise; such an event as the marriage of the beauty whom he had caged so securely in the old tower, to any one but himself, he had never even dreamed of. But now there was no mistaking the situation. The Countess of Scutari had a husband, and all his deep-laid schemes had come to naught.

"Married!" he cried, his brow dark, and lurid light flashing from his evil eyes.

"Yes, married!" cried Catherine, in triumph, her swelling voice sounding high above the bustle and confusion. "I am not yet twenty-one; I have a husband, and the lands of Scutari are mine, safe from your clutches!"

Upon the sudden entrance of the Moslem host, the bridegroom sprung to his feet, and in his right hand gleamed his trusty saber, while his left grasped a silver-mounted, self-cocking revolver.

Lauderdale also had his weapon out. Despite the number of the foe, no thought of surrender or submission was in the mind of either of the two adventurers.

The renegade fairly ground his teeth with rage.

"Upon these two dogs!" he cried, in wrath; "cut them to pieces!"

But neither one of the two friends waited for the Moslem onset.

Between them and the secret stairway—the avenue to liberty—the turbanded host were gathered, and bold and straight as the free mountain eagle darting upon his prey, they flung themselves, actuated by a common impulse, upon the armed men.

The barrels of their revolvers clicked around, with marvelous speed, shot succeeding shot, and each bullet found its billet in the person of a Turkish warrior.

And the renegade himself felt the sweeping force of the Scarlet Captain's steel, as, taking advantage of the gap produced in the Turkish line by their well-aimed shots, the adventurers boldly charged forward, striking vigorously for liberty.

The saber of the turk was shattered in twain as he opposed the blade to ward off the powerful stroke which else would have cleft his head in twain.

The force of the blow bent the Turkish leader to the ground, and, seeing him fall, the Turks, believing him to be slain, were seized with a sudden panic and gave way before the bold attack, thus affording the two friends free access to the secret stairway.

Down the winding way the two ran, hastily thrusting their emptied revolvers in their slings, and drawing forth fresh weapons.

They were not yet out of the old tower, and another desperate struggle was certain.

The two gained the open court-yard in the center of the castle.

All was dark, the gates securely closed, while from the loop-holes, pierced in the stone walls for musketry, lights were gleaming and sounds of wild alarm were rising.

Agile as the wild goats of the Montenegrean mountains, the two scampered around the court-yard. Not even a passage could they find, big enough to afford escape to a half-starved dog, with the exception of the open doors of the main stairway of the castle, which was dimly lighted by a single lamp suspended in a niche in the wall.

"We are caged like rats in a trap!" the Scar-

let Captain cried, and the two paused before the stone stairway and looked wishfully up the broad passage.

"Yes; the fall of their leader has evidently confused them, but as soon as they recover we'll have them around us as thick as hornets when the nest is shaken."

"Old fellow, if we escape from this danger, we can mark to-day as one to be remembered!" cried the Montenegrean. "Oh, for the wings of one of the eagles of my own native mountains to surmount these cursed walls!"

The cries of alarm and clang of arms grew louder and louder.

"The tug of war is near at hand!" the American exclaimed, taking advantage of the few moments' respite to recharge his revolver. "We are in for it, and I suppose there is nothing to be done but to sell our lives as dearly as possible, and die game."

Here spoke the courage of the man who had led Longstreet's attacking column at Knoxville, and, entangled in the hedge of telegraph wires and debris, cunningly arranged by the Federal general, had cheered on his men, despite the terrible point-blank fire from the Union forts, until wounded in a dozen places, he had sunk insensible from loss of blood.

"Ah! but my country—Montenegro needs me now!" the Unknown exclaimed. "I have only a single life to lose, but there is no man from the Adriatic to the mountains whose loss would be felt as sorely as mine."

Again the clang of arms rung out, and the tramp of many men sounded upon the air.

The crisis was near at hand.

"To escape through these massive walls is impossible!" Lauderdale cried, "nor are we winged like birds to surmount them; but this stairway is open. Let us boldly dash upward, no matter where it goes! Our position can be no worse than it is at present!"

"An excellent idea!" the Montenegrean assented. "Perhaps by it we can force our way to the roof of the tower, and then from the ramparts it is only a leap of a hundred feet or so down into the sea."

And with the word, the captain sprung up the stairway, closely followed by the American.

Not a moment too soon was this action taken, for they had not ascended three steps when the renegade, recovered from the shock of the blow which had beaten him down, led his Moslem sabers from the gate of the secret stairway into the court-yard.

The Turks had provided themselves with lanterns and torches, and so at once they perceived that the fugitives were missing.

"The gates are closed!" cried dark Hassan; "the main stairway is the only way open!"

"They are safely trapped then!" the renegade replied.

Up the massive way bounded the armed host, the renegade and Hassan in the advance.

They passed the dim circle of light afforded by the lamp in the niche, and toiled upward in the dark, their torches offering but a fitful glare.

And to their listening ears, as they followed so closely in the pursuit, came the jingle of the sabers of the fugitives as they fled toward the roof.

The moon, just rising above the horizon, afforded a dim light for the striking scene about to be enacted upon the ramparts of the old gray tower.

Upon one of the buttresses overhanging the swelling Adriatic sea, stood the two men as the Moslem host rushed out upon the flat roof.

"Fire upon them!" cried the renegade.

A sheet of flame illuminated the top of the dark tower for a second, and by its light the attacking host saw the two adventurers disappear from their airy pinnacle. Down they went into the sea beneath!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BOAT IN THE OFFING.

Down—down! a hundred feet at least. A fearful descent and one that few mortals would care to make.

But were the two adventurers unharmed?

Had they boldly leaped into the sea to escape from their determined and ruthless pursuers, or had the shots of the Turkish muskets taken effect?

Would the blue waters of the Adriatic—so famed in story and in song—receive into its close embrace living men, full of resolution, ready to do and dare, or bleeding, mangled forms, bereft of life's vital spark by the fatal lead of the Moslem muskets?

That was the question which agitated the minds of the renegade and his followers.

Eagerly they rushed to the ramparts and clinging upon the overhanging buttresses gazed down into the dark gulf beneath.

The air of the night was chill, the wind circling with many a mournful sound amid the branches of the trees on the near hillside, and the ever-moving waters of the famed old sea, chafing restlessly against the weather-beaten rocks of the tower, sung a low, wild song, full to the top of many a strange note.

And was the murmur of the tide the requiem

for the dead—the wail of sorrow for the rash men who had found a grave within its bosom, or was it the pean of triumph for the daring hearts who had risked life and all by trusting to old step-mother ocean, and by the venture at one bound had clutched success?

The night was so dark—the light of the moon so feeble—that little could be discerned, as the turbaned host looked down into a misty space where neither life nor death appeared. Nothing but the ceaseless song of the murmuring waves or the shrill scream of the night birds disturbed from their nests in the cavities of the old tower-wall by the flashes of the torches, the clang of arms and the fierce oaths of the wild soldiery.

"Hark!" cried Hassan, perched upon the wall, a torch in his hand, and gazing earnestly down into the dark gulf beneath; "was not that a yell of pain?"

"A bird-cry," answered the renegade, his ever dark face darker than usual at the untoward results of his carefully-planned schemes.

"I am sure that they were hit!" Hassan cried, evidently not willing to believe that the two bold blades could have escaped.

"Yes, yes!" a dozen voices cried in chorus, "they were hit!"

"Oh, yes," Hassan continued, "I saw the tall fellow with the scarlet jacket stagger; he did not leap, he fell from the tower.

"Who knows what is beneath—water or rocks?" the renegade demanded.

"Water—twenty fathoms at the least," replied the old warder of the tower, who chanced to be one of the throng.

"And if a man leaped unhurt from the tower what are the chances of his escaping?" questioned the renegade.

The warder shook his head.

"It is a fearful leap," he replied, evidently in doubt.

"And the result would be certain death, would it not, whether the man was unhurt or not before he leaped?" Hassan cried. In his own mind the Turk was fully satisfied that both of the adventurers had gone to their long home.

"By Allah! I cannot tell!" responded the warder. "No man ever yet made the attempt."

"And if they reached the water unhurt, how far must they swim before they can make a landing on the shore?" Ismail Bey asked. He was just as positive that the two adventurers had escaped the bullets of his followers as they were positive to the contrary.

"Two hundred feet, go they either way," the old man replied.

"We lose time, then, dallying here!" the stern Moslem chief cried. "Away at once to the shore! Hassan, go you to the south while I'll go the north. A hundred gold-pieces to the man who discovers the Montegrean!"

The false son of the noble old mountain race had jumped at once to the nativity of the man who had, at such an untimely hour, wedded Scutari's countess.

Away then, on the instant, the troopers hurried. With hasty steps they raced down the massive stair-case and out through the great stone portals.

Outside the tower the party divided: one squad sped away to the south, the other to the north, and both came to the water's edge just by the ends of the fortress.

The torches flared along the shore and the reflections danced far out on the crest of the waves, but fruitless was the search; no trace of either of the two adventurers could be discovered.

"To-morrow the sea will wash their bodies up on the shore," one of the Turkish officers suggested.

A dark look came over the renegade's face, but he said nothing. It was plain that he was puzzled and was not fully satisfied that the daring man who had come between him and his cherished plans had found a grave in the waters of the Adriatic.

It was a mystery to the wily renegade how the marriage had been arranged, but he believed the Montenegrin to be some lover of the countess who had followed his mistress and had arrived just in time to be of service to her.

Still looking around intently, the quick eyes of the false Montenegrin perceived a tiny white speck afar off in the gloom, dancing upon the bosom of the wave.

"What is that?" he cried; "is it a boat under sail, or do my eyes deceive me?"

"It is a boat, your excellency," answered one of the officers—"a fishing craft, probably, beating into a harbor."

"To me she seems as if she were standing out to sea," Ismail Bey observed, after a long, steady gaze.

"It may be so—it is so, I think," the other assented.

"No need to look further!" the Turkish leader exclaimed. "The men we seek are in yonder boat. She was passing near to the tower when they leaped from it; she picked them up, and now they seek safety in flight."

But not one of the group coincided with the renegade in this opinion, although none chose to say so.

One and all, the general excepted, fully and firmly believed that the two men had found a grave beneath the swelling waters.

Hassan and his party came up.

"Well?" the renegade demanded, in his abrupt, stern way, although it was hardly necessary for him to put the question, for he plainly read failure in the face of his officer.

"Nothing, your excellency, no trace at all."

"Did you observe a fishing-boat standing out from the land?"

"Yes, your excellency."

"It is a hundred chances to one that our men are on board of that boat."

Hassan looked incredulous.

"In the morning search the coast up and down for twenty miles at least and find the captain who sails yonder boat. Have a placard issued offering a reward of a hundred pieces of gold for information which will lead to the capture of either one of these two men."

Hassan bowed.

The renegade beckoned the Turk apart.

"Call a council of my chief officers here in the tower at twelve to-night; there is mischief afoot, I fear. We have lost the Scutari district, and we must strike a severe blow at once or else we will have the Scutari men-at-arms on the Montenegrin side; but if we can succeed in dispersing this Montenegrin force in the Duga pass, we may at least hold Scutari neutral."

Hassan proceeded at once upon his mission and the renegade entered the tower.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RENEGADE'S PLAN.

STRAIGHT to the apartment of the countess the renegade proceeded. He entered without ceremony and found the two ladies standing by the great oval window looking out upon the sea, anxiously peering down into the darkness beneath.

Catherine, with all her haughty pride, had felt concerned for the safety of the man who had so boldly thrust his head into the lion's mouth for her sweet sake.

Quick in wit, as women naturally are, she had dispatched the old priest to learn how the fray had ended, and the aged Ivan ascertained without difficulty from the first Turkish soldier whom he had encountered that the two adventurers had been chased to the roof of the old tower and from the parapet, to escape the Moslem bullets, had boldly leaped into the sea.

A fearful chance for life!

"Am I a widow then, almost as soon as wedded?" the countess murmured, as she gazed from the window of the old tower upon the inky gulf beneath and listened to catch the sound which would tell of a strong man's struggle against grim death.

Afar up and down along the shore, beyond the walls of the tower, she could see the torches of the Turkish soldiery flaming out in the darkness of the night, and every now and then to her ears the free winds brought the sound of the Moslem laugh and the sound of the Moslem curse, but no trace of the gallant fellow who had so freely risked his life for her sake.

The abrupt entrance of Ismail Bey turned the attention of the two ladies from the scene without to the fierce warrior within.

"The first trick in the game is thine, Catherine!" the renegade said, "thanks to this meddling priest!" and he scowled at the affrighted Father Ivan, who, good, honest soul, would not wantonly have harmed the very worm crawling in the dust beneath his feet.

"All the blame is mine!" cried Catherine, spiritedly. "He but obeyed my orders, and under compulsion, too."

"You are a married woman and have saved your lands," the renegade confessed.

"Yes; and now that you have failed in your purpose, I trust that you will throw open the gates of this tower and let us go free."

"Not so fast," the false Montenegrin replied, a dark smile upon his bronzed face. "The knot that yonder trembling priest has tied with book and prayer, I, with the edge of my saber, have severed. You have been a wife, but now my hand has widowed you."

"My husband is dead?"

"Yes."

"Oh, no!" and a proud smile curled Catherine's superb lip.

The renegade looked annoyed; he had not for an instant imagined that the countess understood how matters had gone.

"Your husband is dead. Why do you imply a doubt?"

"Because it exists," the countess replied, promptly. "To save himself from your bullets the Scarlet Captain and his companion leaped into the sea—"

"And there perished!" interrupted the officer.

"Be not so sure of that!" retorted the countess. "Yonder fishing-boat, now standing out to sea, was but a short time ago running close beneath the walls of the tower. The chances are more than even that, instead of finding a grave under the surface of the tide, the two men, who so boldly dared your anger, are safe in the fishing-boat."

He did not attempt to argue the point, but one thing the officer desired to ascertain—who was the fellow whose unexpected presence in the old tower had so completely baffled his deep-laid plan.

"Who is this man, who, for your sake, has so boldly risked his life?"

"I named him but now—the Scarlet Captain."

"The Scarlet Captain?"

"So he is called."

"A fanciful title, truly; but, what else; has he no other name?"

"None that I am aware of."

The Turkish general knitted his black brows; he fancied that he was being deceived.

"It is useless to attempt to juggle with me!" he exclaimed, impatiently. "You cannot hope to keep the name of this bold fellow from me long; the name of the lover of Catherine, Countess of Scutari, must be well known."

"My lover! Oh! you have arrived at a false conclusion. The man is no lover of mine, nor do I know aught of him, for I do not remember to have ever set eyes upon his face before this night."

The officer looked the amazement which he felt.

"You yourself set the conditions by which I had to abide; a husband I must have before I reached my twenty-first year or else lose my lands. This man came—a perfect stranger to me, and when I questioned him as to his name, and he replied that he was called the Scarlet Captain, I was content. He accepted the terms I imposed; a husband I must have, and he answered the purpose. No lover of mine, though nothing but a tool which I condescended to use in the dire emergency wherein your craft had placed me."

Ismail Bey saw that the lady spoke but the truth and his bold heart admired the daring which had seized upon the sole chance to defeat the plan which would have wrested her lands from her.

In truth it was a brave heart that Catherine of Scutari carried within her woman's breast.

"And now that your scheme is set at naught will you bid the gates of this tower open that I may pass freely to my home?" the lady demanded.

Again the sinister smile on the face of the renegade.

"I said the first trick was yours," he replied, "but the second and the game, upon which your fortunes are staked, I intend to win."

Fire flashed from the brilliant eyes of the countess, but with a great effort she restrained her anger.

"I do not understand," she said, coldly; "please explain."

"You have been married; the chances are that you are now a widow; you are here, in my hands, helpless, a prisoner. If your husband—this nameless adventurer, this Scarlet Captain—is alive, if he has escaped alike the bullets of my soldiers and the waters of the Adriatic, his death is only a question of time, for I shall hunt him down as steadily as the ravening wolves chase the stricken deer. When he is dead, you will be quite free to marry again, and the next time I will take care that no interloper takes my place."

"This is terrible!" cried the countess, in heat; "you will not dare!"

"Oh, will I not? Wait and see! John Belina, the outcast Montenegrin, has dared many things in crossing the gulf which lay between the penniless, friendless lad, driven from his home and kin, and the Governor of Albania, Ismail Bey. This bold adventurer, who has dared to cross my will, is doubtless one of the Montenegrin leaders of the force now holding the Pass of Duga. Within three days I'll cut a way through the pass and send this rabble, which calls itself an army, howling to their mountain homes. With a heel of iron I'll stamp Montenegro to the dust and make these stubborn mountaineers curse the hour when they were rash enough to brave the power of their master, the Turkish Sultan, and bring upon them the mailed hand of stern-faced war!"

"The Turk has never yet subdued the free mountaineers of Montenegro," Catherine answered spiritedly; "and Russia will never stand tamely by and see a Christian people trampled beneath the feet of the Moslem."

"Wait and see; but whether Montenegro succeeds or fails, you at least shall not escape me. I will keep you safely here until I either ascertain that this bold adventurer is dead, or else succeed in capturing him, in which case, I'll shoot him on the instant. Then you will be free to accept my suit. It is long years, Catherine, since your father drove me from his door because I dared to lift my eyes to you, but the memory of the wrong is as fresh as though it happened only yesterday. The whirligig of time has brought me my revenge, and by my soul I swear that nothing on this earth has power to turn me from my purpose. Your face made me false to my country—drove me forth an outcast, and now only your sweet self can atone for the past. Let no vain hope of escape delude you; the tower is well guarded and every precaution taken. To-morrow I march against

The Scarlet Captain

7

the insurgents, and when I return, Catherine, you shall be mine!"

And then the renegade withdrew from the apartment, leaving behind him consternation, but not despair.

CHAPTER X. THE ADVANCE.

At midnight in the old tower the council of war was held.

The advent of the commander-in-chief had been expected for some time, and, consequently, all was in readiness for an advance in force the moment he arrived and gave the word.

An army of some ten thousand men the Turks had collected in the territory adjacent to the old tower; an army of observation, merely, it was said, but the sturdy mountaineers knew better. They fully understood that when the hour was ripe the Moslem host would sweep through the defiles of Montenegro with all the fury of the mountain avalanche, leaving naught but death and destruction in their track.

Well commanded, too, were the Turkish forces.

No better man in all the sultan's dominions than Mukhtar Pasha, the second in command, and as a cavalry leader all Europe held few abler warriors than dashing Osman Pasha, the wild commander of the wild Bashi Bazouks; and as for the chief of the army, the dark-browed, stern-willed renegade, evil-eyed Ismail Bey, the Persian armies, who had often fled before the edge of his flashing saber, could many a tale of his daring courage and excellent generalship relate; and the gray-coated Russians, too, during the Crimean struggle, learned to dread the Turkish general who seemed to bear a charmed life and fought with the courage of despair.

The Montenegrans, ever on the alert—in their watchful nature like to the eagles of their own native mountains—had not been idle while the Turkish host lay at Dulcigno; like the rolling ball of snow, it grew larger and larger.

Warlike news travels with a fleet foot, and within three days after the first squadron of Bashi Bazouks rode by the old dark tower and went into camp in the forest bordering on the sea which commanded the high road to the north, not a lonely village amid the Montenegrine mountains, perched like eagles' nests amid the hills of pine, but knew that the insolent Turk threatened their own free, native land, and that warriors were needed.

Descendants of the warlike Greeks of old, a nation of shepherd warriors, to throw aside the peaceful tools of agriculture and seize the weapons of war, was but as a second nature.

And so, rushing down from their mountain fastnesses as the wild torrents pour after the thunder lowers and the lightnings flash, the bold and hardy mountaineers seized upon the Pass of Duga, the natural avenue to the Montenegrine land. As to the number of these wild warriors even the well-trained Turkish spies were at fault. One reported a thousand men; another, five thousand.

Little wonder that the wily renegade, perplexed by the conflicting accounts, sought to flank the strong position occupied by the Montenegrine army, rather than attempt to force a passage through the Pass.

And the Montenegrine general—the skillful student in the art of war who had had the wit to seize a position so strong with his weak force that Ismail Bey, with ten thousand veteran troops at his back, hesitated to attempt to force a way through the Pass—who was he?

If Madam Rumor lied about the number of the Christian host, lied she still more recklessly and wildly in regard to the name of the man who, by his first move on the great chess-board of war, had caused skillful Ismail Bey to knit his brows, pull his beard, curse the chance and wonder how he could give a Roland for the Oliver so adroitly tendered.

Nicholas, Prince of Montenegro, was the lineal ruler over the mountain land, but Nicholas was a boy, so termed by the Turkish veterans, one who had

"Never set a squadron in the field

Nor the decision of a battle knew more than a spinster."

And was he, fresh from finishing his education in la belle Paris, gayest city of the old Eastern world, the man to leap at once into the saddle of command—the seat of generalship—and with one single move set at naught the skill of the able Turkish generals?

Oh, no! such an idea was utterly absurd!

The Montenegrine prince, full of French polish, the rough mountaineer lacquered over by the civilization of the wickedest city in all the world, might do well enough to figure in a court-suit and perform the stately ceremonies of power, but to grasp the war-horse's rein, lead men to battle, join the fray where cracked crowns and bloody wounds were to be got and given—no, not he!

The great Russian bear was at the bottom of the mystery.

As perfidious Albion, crafty-trading England had lent Hobart Pasha to the Turks, and so strengthened the Moslem navy with a little Anglo-Saxon oak, so the far-seeing, far-reaching Russian, his eye on Constantinople, his

paw on the Black Sea, had lent some white-headed, sage old general—some Dumskroski or Wiskeranoff, grown gray in service beneath the Russian eagles, to head the Montenegrine army.

And then another flying—and lying, perchance—report! The Montenegrine general was a mountaineer born, but who had been educated in the Russian service expressly for such an emergency.

But, be there truth or falsehood in these reports, there was no denying that the first action of the Montenegrine commander had caused the able Turkish generals to put on their thinking-caps.

Oflan Agan, who, as a cavalry commander, stood second to no captain in the Turkish service, despite his blundering ways, had been assigned the task of discovering some avenue to turn the Montenegrine position.

The Irishman, good judge of human nature, searched carefully until he found a fellow who he thought could be trusted, provided he was paid well enough.

From this man, a native of the soil, by occupation a shepherd, the Bashi Bazouk officer ascertained that there was a lonely footpath over the mountain through which the Pass of Duga led.

With two companions, fowling-pieces in hand, in disguise, and apparently on sport intent, the Irishman explored the lonely way.

He found the words of the shepherd true in every particular.

Up and over and through the beetling crags the path ran, and finally debouched into the level plain a short half-mile north of the northern end of the Duga Pass.

To transport artillery over the mountain by means of the obscure path was impossible, but a regiment of men or a squadron of horse could easily travel the steep and uncertain way.

Here then was an easy solution of the problem which had perplexed the Turkish commanders.

While a few thousand men engaged the attention of the Montenegrans in the Pass, a strong column could, by means of the mountain road, be thrown abruptly in the rear of the Christian position.

Of course, this movement accomplished, the total destruction of the Montenegrine army must follow.

At one o'clock, the council separated, and with the daylight, the Turkish column, the renegade in command, plunged into the defile and commenced the flank movement, while Mukhtar Pasha prepared to amuse the mountaineers by a sham attack in their front.

High up on a beetling crag, concealed amid the sturdy pines, two men watched the Turkish host entangled in the mountain defiles.

"God is great!" cried the Scarlet Captain, for one of the men was he. "Yon army is delivered, helpless, into my hands!"

CHAPTER XI.

FORCING THE PASS.

WITH his chosen men, a picked force, the dark-browed renegade had marched out, not with all the pride and pomp of glorious war, but with the same stealthy caution that the red Indian of North America uses when he proposes to spring upon his foe.

No easy task was this passage of the mountain chain—this scaling of the natural barrier which God had given for the protection of the Montenegrine land.

Two thousand men had been assigned to the task; Bashi Bazouks all, the wildest dare-devils of the old Ottoman empire.

So rough the path that each soldier was forced to dismount and lead his steed.

With the great Napoleon's passage of the Alps and sudden descent into the smiling Italian plains, this feat of arms would rank if the attempt proved successful.

At early break of day this expedition had started, and in order to conceal the movement and to prevent any knowledge of the bold plan from reaching the ears of the Montenegrine force holding the Pass of Duga, Mukhtar Pasha, at the head of the main army, some ten thousand men, advanced toward the Pass as if intending to force a way through.

With all his bugles sounding, cymbals clashing and drums beating, the Ottoman army advanced.

The Montenegrans were on the alert, and the Moslem skirmish line, which the Turkish pasha had deployed to unmask the position of the enemy, were received with so hot a fire that they were speedily driven back to the cover of the main body.

There was no mistaking the fact: the insurgents were in strong force right in front of the Turkish line.

And then, in order to save his men and at the same time occupy the enemy, for Mukhtar knew well enough that to attempt to assault the Montenegrans' position and carry it by storm would only entail a fearful loss of men with no corresponding advantage, the Turk commenced to bring up his heavy guns and began to shell the enemy in his front.

To the utter astonishment of the Turk the

insurgents were evidently well provided with artillery, for they replied with so destructive a fire that in six hours' time the assailants were compelled to withdraw their guns from the advanced position in which they had placed them.

The Turks had already suffered severely, considering that all this time they had only been "feeling" the enemy's position.

But the great object, time, had been gained.

According to the calculation of the commander-in-chief, skillful, ruthless Ismail Bey, the passage of the mountains should not occupy more than six or eight hours, and at high noon the Turkish column ought to be in position on the plain back of the Duga Pass.

Therefore, in obedience to the orders which he had received, Mukhtar Pasha held his troops well in hand and pressed the Montenegrans in the Pass closely, prepared to assail them in full force the moment he saw any signs of weakness apparent on their part; such weakness as would most surely be produced by the sudden appearance of a force equal to, if not exceeding their own, right in their rear.

According to the best information the Turkish commander could gain, the Montenegrine strength was from one to two thousand men.

High noon came at last, and in obedience to his orders Mukhtar Pasha made a most vigorous and determined assault upon the insurgents.

His instructions to his corps commanders were to press the enemy severely, and if they showed signs of weakening to follow up the attack and so bring on a general battle.

The instructions were carried out to the letter, but so far from being able to make any impression upon the Montenegrine line, the Turks were received with so much warmth, and were so severely handled, that, after a sharp fight of a little over an hour, the Moslem general was glad to sound the retreat and fall back to his former position.

A thousand men at least this "reconnaissance-in-force" had cost the Turks, and the only advantage that they could boast was that they had gained the unpleasant knowledge that the Montenegrine position was well-nigh impregnable.

Evidently the mountain column had been detained by some unforeseen accident, and had not yet succeeded in reaching the plain in the rear of the insurgents' position.

Smarting under the rough handling he had received, yet still keeping his force well in hand, ready to launch it at the slightest notice upon the stubborn foe, who in their mountain fastness had made so brave a resistance, Mukhtar sat in his saddle, surrounded by his staff, watching the course of the sun in the high heavens above, now far past the meridian, cursing the delay with all that eloquence common to the swarthy son of the Orient.

And where was the evil genius, dark Ismail and his wild Bashi Bazouks? What had detained them?

We will follow the progress of the column.

At early break of day the Bashi Bazouks had broken camp and commenced the march.

Oflan Agan with his regiment led the advance, Skipton Pasha guarded the rear.

So steep the way that all were compelled to dismount and lead their horses. The guide, the simple mountaineer, the shepherd, whom the cunning Irish-Turk had bribed to betray his country, led the advance. A stupid, dull-looking fellow was this shepherd, by name, John Catana. Oflan Agan had picked him up in the low drinking-shop in the village, and learning that he was a native of the mountains and well acquainted with every foot of the soil, perceived at once that he was the very man needed. The fellow at first had refused, point-blank, to guide the army over the mountains—had sworn by all the saints that there was no path, and that it was madness to think of such a thing. But, the Irishman knew full well the influence of gold with such men, and at once he dazzled the eyes of the peasant with a silken purse, through whose meshes the ducats shone. The contents of the purse was wealth for a lifetime to the simple shepherd, and thus by one bound to rise from poverty to affluence was something too much to be despised.

The lure succeeded and the fellow yielded.

Something strange, too, this fact, for, as a general rule, these mountaineers, rugged as the hills whereon they live, are as honest as the day, and blessed with a love for their country far surpassing that experienced by the denizens of lower and more fertile plains.

After the guide—for so steep and narrow the path oftentimes, that it only afforded room for one abreast—came Oflan Agan, and then the commander of the host, the stern-faced renegade; and close on his heels, Osman Pasha, the sultan's favorite general; and then followed the two thousand men in single file, each man with tight hand upon the bridle reins of his fiery little steed, for the horses of the Bashi Bazouks, though claiming descent straight from the matchless Arab steeds of the Bedouin deserts, the stallions "shod with fire," are yet generally undersized; and as they toiled upward, nearly every one of the wild fellows

The Scarlet Captain.

cursed with able eloquence the unlucky chance that had dismounted him from his charger's back and forced him to trust to his own natural means of locomotion.

The Bashi Bazouk and his horse, like the Tartar and his steed, the Don Cossack and his beast, or the Arab and his mare, are seldom found apart. Dismount him and his usefulness as a soldier is gone.

For three long miles the column toiled, straight up the steep mountain side, and then, the crest of the rocky range gained, they plunged through the pine forests and entered upon the broken and irregular ground beyond; no looking back now upon the pleasant valley of Dulcigno, with the smiling waters of the Adriatic laving the silver shore, while afar out on the surface of the blue expanse the white-winged fisher-boats glided up and down. Naught now but desolation—the rugged, beetling crag, the blast-torn pine, rough earth beneath, murky sky above, through which the sun apparently disdained to shine, for he had not yet broke forth, "though by the clock he should have braved the east an hour ago"—surrounded the Turkish column.

The gloom of this wild region presaged only despair and death.

CHAPTER XII.

A MONTENEGREAN'S FAITH.

THE broken table-land lying directly on the summit of the rocky range being passed, the column began to descend, the way leading through rough and gloomy defiles. The path widened a little so that two or three could walk abreast. Taking advantage of this the renegade ordered the column to close up. Many a suspicious glance the Turkish commander had cast around him; never in all his military experience had he seen a locality better fitted for an ambuscade.

The country through which they were passing was now well-wooded, and afforded ample opportunity for a foe to conceal himself without danger of detection. Already the column had been some five hours on the march, and were still apparently in the very heart of the mountains. Ismail Bey began to grow impatient. He summoned Oflan Agan to his side.

"Are you sure, captain, that this guide can be trusted?" he asked.

"Oh, yis; sorra a doubt of that."

"You have traversed the path with him once?"

"Yis, sor."

"And came out in the valley north of Duga Pass?"

"Bedad, I did!"

"But it is nearly time, according to the calculation which you gave me, for us to begin to descend the mountain preparatory to debouching on the plain."

"Yis, your excellency; that is quite correct. A little way further on, an' we turn to the right, d'y'e mind, an' thin it's only a mile or two beyant to the valley."

"You are sure that you have made no mistake? Remember, captain, the lives of all the command depend upon your memory. This guide may be a false one, luring us onward to destruction."

"Shure! I'd put a bullet through his head at the first sign of treachery!" the Bashi Bazouk officer cried, promptly.

"Sometimes a man will die for his country," the renegade observed, gravely. "These Montenegrans are made of stubborn stuff."

"Faith! I think the fellow is too big a fool to try such a game."

"Perhaps," the Turkish general replied, doubtfully, "but keep a wary eye upon him."

"Oh, I'll do that same, your excellency. Be the holy smoke! if he betrays us, it's a ticket straight for blazes I'd give him!"

Oflan Agan resumed his former position.

A short distance on, the guide turned abruptly to the right just as the Irishman had predicted, a fact which caused the jolly Irish-Turk to chuckle with satisfaction.

A mile or so more the column proceeded. Oflan Agan's sharp eyes had been busy in scanning the surrounding country, and a look of doubt and uncertainty began to gather on his face. The Irishman prided himself upon his excellent memory, but, to his astonishment, he could not remember a single detail of the scenery of the particular bit of country through which the column was now passing.

The guide had turned to the right, and then after a brief period had turned to the right again, and at the time, this second turning had perplexed the Bashi Bazouk, for he did not remember to have bent to the right but once, but thinking, perhaps, that he had not noticed closely, being in so strange and wild a country, and that the fact might have escaped him, he said nothing.

But now the column had entered upon a section of country which he felt sure his eyes had never rested upon before. They were traversing a small, quite open valley, bounded by ranges of rocks rising in regular tiers one above the other, like the circles of an amphitheater. This valley was about a mile long, and the column, taking advantage of the ground, had

closed up the ranks so that the whole expedition was well in hand, and were all fairly within the valley before the puzzled Irishman could make up his mind.

The guide, indeed, had reached the narrow gorge, which was half-hidden by a thick growth of pines, through which the way led from the open space, before the Bashi Bazouk officer decided to take action.

And then, just as the guide placed his foot upon a rock, which was in the path, and half turned his head as if to see that the men he led were close behind, Oflan Agan sprung forward, his fiery face burning with rage and clapped a pistol to the head of the mountaineer.

"Dog! you have been leading us astray!" the Irishman exclaimed.

The renegade and his companion officers, perceiving the action, hurried to the spot. The peasant stared with an expression of blank astonishment upon his stolid features into the face of the officer.

"Wretch of a mountaineer!" continued Oflan Agan; "ye murtherin' blaggard! ye are desavin' us! This is not the road!"

"Mountaineer, if you have deceived us, your life will pay the forfeit!" Ismail Bey cried, sternly.

"By Saint James and Saint John, I am an honest man!" the guide protested. "This is the direct way into the vale *north* of the Duga Pass!"

"Aha! ye blaggard! but this is not the way ye took me the other day!" the Irishman cried.

"And did I say that it was?" the peasant replied. "Did I not tell you that it was impossible to take horses *that way*?"

"Oh, yis, I know ye did; but the horses can go for all of that!"

"This is an easier and a better path every way."

"But why did you not tell us that you intended to choose another road?" asked the Turkish commander, suspiciously.

"As Heaven is my judge, I did not know that it made any difference to you!" the guide exclaimed, with an expression of great candor. "You said that you wished me to conduct you to the vale north of the Duga Pass by the best road, and I am doing so faithfully. But if you like we can go back and take the other path; it makes no difference to me, only this is the best and the easiest road."

The renegade stepped back a few paces and beckoned to the others. A hurried and whispered consultation the Turkish officers held.

"What do you think of this fellow, Osman?" Ismail asked.

"Rogue written in every line of his face," the blunt soldier replied. "If you will take my advice, you'll string the fellow up to the nearest tree until he confesses that he has misled us. Why, it is after high noon now, and he said that he could make the vale before the sun crossed the meridian."

"Tare an' ounds! your excellency, I don't know what to advise!" Oflan Agan observed, perplexed. "The baste may be honest enough wid his two roads, an' then ag'in he may not be!"

"Did he ever mention to you before that there were two roads?" Ismail asked.

"Sorra a word!"

"I fear that he is trying to lead us into a trap; perhaps we are in the trap already," and as he spoke the Turkish leader cast an anxious look at the dark circle of pine-clad hills which surrounded the position occupied by the column.

"Oh, no fear of that, your excellency!" Oflan Agan exclaimed, with the confidence which was so natural to the impulsive, warm-hearted Irishman.

"I do not feel sure of that, and we must be on our guard," Ismail protested, an anxious look upon his dark brow. "Every line of rock here is a natural fortification, and a well-armed enemy, intrenched upon the slopes of these hills, would be almost certain to be able to laugh defiance at any effort on our part to dislodge them."

And then to the ears of the Turks came the sounds of distant cannonading. The wind had abruptly changed and so carried the news of the battle, raging in the Pass of Duga, to the column marching as a forlorn hope over the mountain-range.

The dark face of Ismail brightened up.

"Aha!" he said, "we are near the Pass, and Mukhtar is at them."

He turned to speak to the guide, but no guide was there.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SCARLET CAPTAIN AGAIN.

THE peasant had disappeared.

The Turkish officers glared around in amazement, but their eyes were not keen enough to discover the person of the mountaineer, who was now safely hid in the tangled mass of pine which fringed the sides of the rocky range.

John Catana, shepherd, of Dulcigno, was not so big a fool as he looked. He saw that suspicion was aroused against him, and so took advantage of the attention of the Turks being attracted by the cannonading to slip into the thicket of pine which was so conveniently near,

and thus put his precious carcass at a safe distance from the pistol of the quick-tempered Irish Bashi Bazouk.

Suspicion now became a certainty.

The sounds of the distant artillery practice, borne so freely on the bosom of the free winds, plainly revealed that Mukhtar Pasha was duly carrying out his orders pounding away diligently at the insurgents in the Pass.

But this solitary column, entangled in the mountain passes, deserted by their guide, evidently betrayed, what course should it adopt?

"Bad 'cess to the blaggard!" cried Oflan Agan, in a rage, when he discovered that the peasant was missing. "I ought to have pistoled him on the spot the moment I discovered that he was leading us astray."

"What say ye, gentlemen, shall we push on or retreat?" the renegade asked.

"Oh, advance by all means, your excellency!" Osman Pasha exclaimed. "We cannot be very far from the vale, or else the sound of the guns would not come so distinctly to our ears."

"Maybe I frightened the scut wid me threats an' he fancied that he was going to be kilt anyway, an' that's the rason he's given leg-bail," Oflan suggested.

"We shall soon know the truth," Ismail said, gravely, "and we must prepare for the worst. Captain, take a squad with you and skirmish forward. We had better not attempt to advance until we see what is before us."

Oflan hurried away to execute the order, while Ismail prepared the column either to advance, retreat, or give battle where they were.

The men, true soldiers, had taken advantage of the brief halt to snatch a few minutes' rest, but with the word of command were soon in the ranks again, although when the order to prepare for the fight was given, they wondered much, for no sign of the enemy could they see.

But mountain warfare is not carried on according to written rules of war. Ofttimes the first indication afforded by the Montenegrans to their antagonists of an attack was the wild, impetuous onslaught, the prelude to victory.

Not three paces had Oflan Agan taken with his squad of skirmishers, when the shrill notes of a bugle-horn rung out clear and free on the mountain air, and at the signal, as if by magic, the green hillsides seemed to swarm with Montenegrin warriors.

From the shelter of each pine the long-barreled musket of the mountaineer shone; not a rock but appeared to serve as a rest for some tall, free son of the mountain land to level his piece at the hated Moslem.

A glance at the map of Europe will show the seeker after knowledge that Montenegro is very small and Turkey very large, yet when we turn to the pages of history we will learn that the mountaineers have always more than held their own against the men who pretend to be the masters of all the land washed by the eastern waves of the Adriatic.

Sharp and quick were the commands of stern Ismail. No thought now of longer attempting to force his way through to the vale north of the Douga Pass. He understood that the guide, false to him, was at heart a true Montenegrine, and had purposely led the Moslem column astray. One hope only—to retreat, cutting a way through the mountaineers, who appeared to be in strong force between the Turks and their homeward road.

So far not a shot had been fired on either side. The Turks were occupied in reforming their column, the Montenegrans, silently resting on their arms, observing the carrying out of the movement.

By the change the advance was given to Skipton Pasha's division, with Osman Pasha in command; and even the doughty heart of the gallant Englisher sunk a bit as he looked upon the foe and saw how strongly the line was posted.

The horses had been sent to the rear and picketed together. The animals were worse than useless in such a contest as was at hand.

And then, just as the Turkish commander was about to give the signal for the attack, again the bugle sounded, and forth from the insurgent ranks stepped a group of men, evidently officers, bearing a white flag.

The Montenegrans desired a parley.

The eye of hate is quick, they say—as quick sometimes as the eye of love—and it was little wonder that at the first glance the dark renegade recognized in the opposing ranks the person of the Scarlet Captain!

The adventurer with the fanciful name—the Slasher of Scutari—had tumbled into matrimony and then into the blue waters of the smiling Adriatic, yet here he was alive and well, to tell of it!

In his hand the Scarlet Captain bore the flag of truce, and, accompanied by four Montenegrin officers, advanced down the hillside to the edge of the vale, where the Bashi Bazouks, looking and feeling like sheep penned for the slaughter, were sullenly waiting for the word "Advance!"

Ismail took a white handkerchief from his pocket, fastened it to the end of his saber, and

bidding two officers of his staff accompany him, advanced to meet the Montenegrine flag of truce.

"Who commands yonder Turkish troops?" the Scarlet Captain asked, haughtily, after the Moslems had arrived within speaking distance, and the customary salutations had been exchanged.

"By what right do you ask the question?" cried Ismail, with the haughtiness common to the Oriental potentate.

"By right of the command imposed upon me by his highness, Nicholas, Prince of Montenegro, upon whose territory you now are," replied the mountaineer, with equal *hauteur*.

"Nicholas, Prince of Montenegro?"

"My master, who is desirous of knowing why in a time of peace—no war declared—so large a Turkish force marches over his border—your intent—your purpose?"

"Does Prince Nicholas command this force?" and the renegade gazed long and earnestly at the bold mountaineers crouched behind their muskets, their eyes gleaming wildly along the polished barrels.

"He does."

"Go tell him that I, Ismail Bey, Governor of Albania, desire a conference with him."

"Go tell your master, Turkey's sultan, to advance, and then Nicholas of Montenegro will speak to him; he does not deal with lackeys," replied the Montenegrine, haughtily.

The brow of dark Ismail grew darker yet, and he clenched his hands convulsively together.

"By the Prophet, young sir, you speak with far too free a tongue!" Ismail exclaimed. "The general of the Porte am I, and even great Persia's ruler has thought fit to humbly sue for an audience at my hands. To his master, the Turkish sultan alone, does Ismail Bey bow his head!"

"And yet to my master, the Montenegrine prince, you are worth nothing more than one John Belina, his native-born subject, a renegade, who, marching beneath the Moslem crescent, forgets that he was once a Christian. This John Belina is in your ranks and my master demands him that he may be tried and punished. This traitor given up, the rest of the host may have free passage from Montenegrine territory."

To depict the wrath which swelled within the bosom of the renegade, were vain task for any pen or tongue. Black in the face he grew, and the great veins swelled almost to bursting.

"Back to your line, you scarlet dog!" he cried, "and before the day is ended, your schoolboy prince will find that he had better have sought to plunge his head within the mouth of an angry bear than grapple on the red field of war with Ismail Bey!"

"Before the day is done, your standards down, your soldiers slaughtered, and yourself either dead or a prisoner in our hands, will serve as a terrible warning to your insolent master that he can never hope to conquer the free mountaineers of Montenegro!" the other replied.

The flags of truce separated.

Ten minutes more and the fight began.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BATTLE.

AND as dark Ismail joined his men, oh! how he longed for a few pieces of light artillery to shell the well-posted mountaineers from their rocky defenses.

"Forward!" cried the renegade, drawing his bright saber and flashing the keen blade in the air.

"Allah! Allah!" yelled the Bashi Bazouks, dashing forward at the top of their speed toward the entrance to the little vale wherein they had been entrapped.

And with the cry of the fierce Turkish warriors came the rapid discharge of musketry from the Montenegrine line.

Shot succeeded shot in rapid succession; no regular discharge by platoons and companies, but the deadly, dropping fire of the skirmish line.

No better marksmen, probably, in all the world than these same Montenegrine mountaineers trained from childhood to the use of their weapons.

Terrible was the effect of the fire. Man after man went down—the way taken by the advancing column plainly marked by disabled, groaning men.

Adopting the tactics of their opponents, the Bashi Bazouks returned the discharge, each Turk striving to pick some particular man on the mountain side, but the mountaineers, securely protected by the natural rocky ramparts behind which they were posted, suffered little.

A good half-mile it was from the position occupied by the Turks when the fight began to the entrance to the valley which they were striving to gain. Imagine, then, this column of two thousand men rushing along at the top of their speed over this half-mile, exposed to a flanking fire from both sides of the ridge, and losing two or three men at every stride.

"It must slacken at last!" the renegade

cried, leading on the charge right valiantly, to Osman Pasha, who was at his side.

"By the Prophet! mortal man cannot stand it much longer!" the swarthy Turk replied.

And hardly had the words left his lips, when he was struck by a well-aimed ball.

"Oh, Allah!" cried the stricken man, throwing up his hands and falling forward, prone upon his face.

The fall of Osman checked the advance; the Turks halted, irresolutely, and the Montenegrine leader, with that rare instinct, common only to the born general, perceiving that the decisive moment had come, gave the word to the reserve body of his men lying perdu at the mouth of the little vale right in the face of the Turks.

Up jumped the line, two or three hundred strong, and poured a terrible point-blank fire right in upon the already badly beaten Bashi Bazouks, and then dashed madly forward on the charge.

With howls of terror, the Turks broke and fled, many of them, in the awful panic of fear which had seized upon them, throwing away their weapons that they might run the faster.

The steady voice of the Scarlet Captain, who was apparently in command of this Montenegrine reserve corps, checked the advance of his men; like a careful huntsman, he held his well-trained dogs of war well in hand.

So far the victory had been an almost bloodless one, and the wily Montenegrine leader did not intend to push the desperate Turks to the wall, and so sacrifice the precious lives of his followers.

The pursuit was checked, but the cool and deliberate marksmen on the hillside still poured a galling, destructive fire into the flying Bashi Bazouks.

For once in their lives these able servants of plunder and rapine got all the blood they wanted. Brave as bull-dogs, and as blind in their rage, yet like the brute they knew and feared the master's hand when once they had learned its strength!

The Montenegrine fire slackened; the Turks, huddled together at the far end of the vale, begrimed with the smoke of the powder, many of them covered with blood from their dripping wounds, bore but little semblance to an army; their ranks broken, all discipline lost, they gathered round their captains, a miserable mass of beaten fugitives.

Over half of the entire command had fallen in the brief but bloody fight.

Their own chosen commander, gallant Osman, had been severely wounded, and was now lying helpless upon the field of battle, completely at the mercy of the victorious foe.

It was a bitter fall to the pride of the great Ismail Bey, the victor of many a well-fought battlefield, this terrible defeat at the hands of the simple mountaineers, led, too, by a boy prince—for so the Turkish general esteemed Nicholas of Montenegro, fresh from the gilded saloons of gay and brilliant Paris.

The Montenegrine fire had ceased; a breathing time had come to both the contending parties.

And now, again to the ears of the beaten and exhausted Turks came the sounds of distant but heavy cannonading. Ismail Bey knew the meaning of this artillery duel right well. Mukhtar Pasha was endeavoring to force a passage through the Duga Pass, and a grim smile came over the renegade's stern features as the thought came to his mind that perhaps in the pass Mukhtar would avenge the present defeat 'mid the mountains.

The Montenegrine force that now held him in check must number a thousand men at least; it was plain that the insurgent force in the pass must have been considerably weakened to gather so large an army to dispute his passage over the mountains.

And Mukhtar, with his nine or ten thousand men, falling suddenly upon the weakened force left to guard the pass, aided, too, by heavy artillery, would surely succeed in forcing a passage through, and thus in a measure atone for the slaughter of this bloody battle.

Ah! if the dark renegade, from his mountain height, could have only had keenness of vision enough to pierce the rocky barrier and the curtaining pines which lay between him and the pass, and see what was going on there—have witnessed Mukhtar's desperate attack, his complete and bloody repulse—seen the cannoneers of the Turks driven from their position, the guns silenced by the Montenegrine artillery, and the able pasha baffled at every point, he would have had still more cause to curse the evil fortunes of the day.

Oflan Agan, who had been left in charge of the detachment caring for the horses, had taken advantage of the confusion attending the brief but bloody battle to discover if there was a practicable path at the lower end of the vale where the false guide had disappeared.

But he found that there was not even a track fit for a wild goat, while the Montenegrines were posted in strong force in the hills beyond.

It was plain that the guide had designedly led the Turkish force into an ambuscade, and

that he was about to give them the slip at the very moment that his treachery was suspected and he was called to an account.

When the Irish-Turk communicated the result of his researches to the commander-in-chief, Ismail at once called a council of war. There was little difference of opinion among the Turkish officers. The result of the brief and bloody fight, attended by such slaughter, had convinced them that it was hopeless to attempt to break through the wall of fire with which the insurgents had surrounded them.

Officer after officer reiterated the same opinion.

"To resist is hopeless: the chance of war is against us; already our men suffer from thirst and we are cut off from water; let us make the best terms we can and surrender."

Not a man expressed a dissenting opinion. Why sacrifice life uselessly?

Ismail Bey listened calmly until all were through. As yet he had expressed no opinion.

"Well, Allah wills it! It is our kismet!" he said, with all the stoical Oriental fatalism so common to the children of the East.

"Battles have I fought," he continued, "victories won and defeats sustained, but never yet surrendered. Oflan Agan, in the absence of Osman Pasha I resign the command of this force into your hands; make the best terms you can. God's will be done."

And then the renegade strode away from the rest and seating himself under a pine, near where the guide had so abruptly disappeared, seemed lost in reflection.

Oflan Agan at once dispatched a flag of truce to the Montenegrine commander.

The answer was brief; no terms at all; nothing but an unconditional surrender.

In truth the Turks expected nothing better, and so the agreement was made. The command laid down their arms and surrendered at discretion.

But dark Ismail Bey, the renegade, was missing!

CHAPTER XV.

THE SURPRISE OF MUKHTAR.

As we have said, Mukhtar Pasha, the Ottoman general, sat in his saddle watching the course of the sun in the heavens, and cursing the delay which attended the movements of his superior officer, Ismail Bey, with great fluency.

Two o'clock had come and yet no sign from the Montenegrine position indicating that the forlorn hope of two thousand men, which had toiled up the mountain-side at early dawn of day, had succeeded in their design of gaining a position in the rear of the insurgent host. All was still as death in either army. The skirmish lines confronted each other closely, almost within rifle range, and the Turkish commander had given strict orders that he should be warned of the slightest movement on the part of the Montenegrines indicating a disposition to withdraw into the pass.

The descent of Ismail Bey and his two thousand men right in the rear of the insurgents would be certain to produce considerable of a commotion, and as the Montenegrine force could not possibly exceed two thousand men all told, the abrupt appearance of a Turkish force fully as large, right in their rear, must force them to withdraw men from the line holding the pass in front to confront the new danger in the rear.

A solemn stillness was over the scene; a chance passer-by surveying the pleasant valley from one of the neighboring heights would not have been apt to guess that the two armed forces facing each other so closely were bent on hostile purpose.

Mukhtar had withdrawn his artillery from the insecure position, rendered untenable by the fire of the foe, and had posted it on a wooded ridge, a spur of the mountain range, which projected into the plain, on his right. In the rear of the artillery a single regiment only was posted, for the position was naturally so strong, protected on one flank by the mountain range and on the other by the plain, wherein all the rest of the Turkish host was posted, that there was really little need even of a single regiment in reserve to support the guns.

The old Turkish commander would have laughed to scorn the idea of his artillery being in any danger from the handful of insurgents intrenched within the pass.

True, from the natural strength of the position which their leader had chosen with such skill, the Montenegrines could make a hard fight against ten times their number, but to leave their fortifications and attempt to assail the Turkish position would only be the height of madness. Once in the plain, free from the cover of their rocky ramparts, the superior numbers of the Moslems would have told fearfully.

No danger of the insurgents assuming the offensive; such an idea never entered the head of the Turkish general; the problem for him to solve was, not to protect himself against a possible assault, but to force a passage through the intrenchments of the Montene-

greans, without losing too many men in the operation.

Time passed rapidly on. The Turkish general, surrounded by his staff, and in conference with his principal officers, chafed and fumed at the delay.

"Three o'clock!" he exclaimed, consulting the jeweled time-piece he wore; the stern old warrior was quite a dandy in regard to his jewelry. "By Allah! night will soon be here; we have hardly time now to fight a good battle before the darkness will be upon us."

One of the staff, with a field-glass, was watching the signal officer posted with the skirmish line far in the advance.

"A signal, general!" the officer cried, eagerly.

"Ala!" cried old Mukhtar; "what is it—what does he say?"

"The enemy are drawing in their line!" the aid replied, translating the flagged signal.

"By the Prophet! it is time!" the old Turk cried. "Ismail is in their rear! Action, gentlemen, action! Signal the artillery to open fire, and under cover of it advance all along the line! Push them hard! We'll win or die!"

Away galloped the aids with their messages; the signal-officer attached to the staff of the commander-in-chief gave the order for the artillery to open fire. The soldiers who had been lying on their arms, restless and uneasy at the delay, sprung at once gayly into line. The roar of the artillery echoed over the plain, and under cover of the fire, every piece in action, Mukhtar hurled a division of three thousand men at the frowning rocks behind which the Montenegrans' line lay.

To the sound of the wild, martial music of the Moslem the column advanced, springing forward with the long, loping stride, peculiar to the Turks, who, as soldiers, to "give the devil his due," are second to no race on earth.

The cymbals clashed, the trumpets blared, drums beat, and old Mukhtar, from his post of observation, watching the onward dash of the column, smiled with grim satisfaction as he noted the splendor of the advance.

A second division of three thousand more men lay in a cornfield yellow with the ripening grain to the left of the moving column.

"Bid Selim Bey—the general in command of this second division—hold his forces well in hand to support the attack and advance at his own discretion."

The aid galloped away with his message.

A third division, nearly four thousand strong, lay at the back of the commander-in-chief. This was the reserve.

"Come, gentlemen, we shall be wanted there presently!" cried Mukhtar, and he pointed his bronzed finger at the Montenegrans' line now silent as the grave. "Advance! we'll sweep this rabble out of yonder pass as easily as a schoolmaster flogs his pupils!"

And away went the reserve at full speed.

Indeed, it did look as if the insurgents had abandoned their position, for, despite the fact that the Turks had opened fire on them with every gun, not a single piece of their artillery had given tongue as yet.

"Allah, Allah!" the wild shout of the charging warriors rung on the air, and the heads of the column were so near the rocky rampart behind which lurked the insurgents, that they could plainly see the glitter of their cannon. For the moment it looked as if the attacking column was going to sweep over the intrenchments without resistance.

"By Allah! the Pass is ours!" cried fierce Mukhtar, urging the reserve onward, determined to push the insurgents hotly, for he believed that they had abandoned their works and were flying in dismay.

But, as if in answer to the haughty boast, along the whole Montenegrans' line burst forth a sheet of flame! Terrible was the discharge, for every gun that the insurgents had mounted had been brought to bear directly on the attacking force. The heads of the column melted away before this withering discharge like the gray fog clouds before the beams of the sun.

The Turks halted, wavered, half-turned to fly; but, the panic checked by the steady advance of the second division, they held their ground and poured an irregular, ineffectual fire in upon their well-posted antagonists—the skillfully-served artillery of the Montenegrans doing terrible execution meanwhile.

Then there came a sudden slackening in the Turkish fire covering the advance. Mukhtar turned in rage to learn the reason, and to his dismay saw that there was a fight going on in the wooded ridge where his guns were posted.

Amazed—thunderstruck! he gazed with staring eyes; saw the gunners fleeing from their guns—the regiment, supporting the artillery, scattering in all directions, a broken mass of fugitives, abandoning arms and equipments that their headlong flight might not be impeded!

All the Turkish artillery had been captured by a Montenegrans' force which had descended suddenly upon the position from the mountain side!

It was the column led by the Scarlet Captain.

With his guns captured, and now turned with deadly result upon the Turkish host, his attacking column held in check, and one-half

of them slain, the old Turk saw that a crisis was at hand.

And soon it came.

The Montenegrans abandoned the defensive and rushing over their ramparts boldly attacked the Turks.

Panic-stricken the Moslems fled; half their force disabled, their guns captured, every standard, even, in the hand of the victorious foe, never was there a victory more decisive!

CHAPTER XVI.

WAITING.

ALL night long the din and clang of arms had resounded throughout the old tower.

The two ladies, closely confined to their apartments, clearly understood that some important movement was at hand, and it was late before they retired to rest, so occupied were they in listening to the warlike sounds.

And with the rising sun they were on the alert, eager to learn the meaning of the bustle and confusion which still reigned supreme in and around the old castle.

But a grim Moslem sentinel was posted at the door, and to the ladies' demand for egress he replied that his orders were to allow no one to pass.

The hot blood of the Scutari countess flamed up at once, and imperiously she demanded an interview with the officer in command of the tower.

"Hassan El Moola commands the tower," the sentinel replied. "In an hour the relief guard will come, and I will deliver your message to the officer in charge."

The man was but obeying his orders, and the angry countess felt that it was only a waste of time to argue with him, and so perforce she had to be content.

A half a dozen obsequious black slaves served the morning meal, and after the repast was over the Bashir Bazouk leader, swarthy Hassan El Moola, made his appearance.

"You are in command of the tower?" the countess asked.

The Turk bowed.

"And am I, the Countess of Scutari, a free Montenegrans' woman, to consider myself a prisoner here in this tower?"

"Oh, no, lady," the Turkish officer replied, quickly.

"And yet you place a sentinel at my door."

"A measure of precaution only," the officer explained. "The castle has been full of troops—wild and lawless soldiery, impatient of control, and not yet tamed down by the rigor of active service. Thirsting with a desire to be led against the enemies of their sultan and their Prophet, eager to meet the insurgents in battle array, his excellency, Ismail Bey, thought it best to protect you from the possibility of insult, and so gave orders to post a sentinel at your door."

"And how long will this state of affairs continue?"

"It is at an end already," the Turk replied. "The troops have marched and you are free to roam where you list within the tower."

"The war has commenced, then?"

"Yes, lady; our army advanced this morning, and by this time they must be in a position to attack the insurgents holding the Duga Pass."

A few more words of unimportant conversation and the interview terminated. The ladies at once hurried to the rampart on the roof of the tower, thinking, perhaps, that they could from that lofty eminence gain a view of the battle evidently near at hand.

This expectation was disappointed though, for the rude and rugged country which surrounded the tower limited the view, except seaward, where the broad expanse of the blue Adriatic seemed to invite the eye.

And as the countess looked from the gray ramparts of the old tower down upon the fretful waters chafing the rocky walls, involuntarily into her mind came the thought of the fearful leap which the two adventurers had taken from the top of the tower into the sea.

"They escaped! be sure they escaped!" cried Alexina, quickly.

The two ladies stood side by side, gazing down into the blue waters beneath, and was it to be wondered at that the mind of the speaker, full of interest for her lover's daring deed, should naturally imagine that her companion's thoughts ran in the same channel?

A slight shade of annoyance passed over the beautiful face of the countess. In truth she was thinking of the adventurer and his desperate leap for life, and yet was unwilling to own that her thoughts were thus occupied.

"They escaped; I am sure of it!" Alexina repeated. "The fishing-boat we saw, running close in beneath the walls, surely rescued them, and some day they will repay this dark renegade the debt they owe."

"Did you not have some conversation with your American regarding this Scarlet Captain as he calls himself?" asked the countess.

"A few words only."

"And who is he? Did the American reveal his name?"

"No, I know no more than you."

"He is a Montenegrans'?"

"I believe so."

The conversation at this point was rudely interrupted by the booming of distant cannon.

It was the sound of Mukhtar Pasha's artillery; the Turkish leader striving to force a passage through the Duga defile.

The two girls listened to the sounds of war, and after awhile, rising on the horizon, they saw the white puffs of smoke, the sign and seal of the raging fight. And all through the long forenoon the two friends strained their eyes, anxious to ascertain how the fight was going.

Catherine, well acquainted with the country, understood the object of the Turks, and knew that in the Duga Pass the hardy mountaineers were nobly battling for freedom.

At noon the chief of the black slaves informed her that dinner was being served. The countess had little appetite, but, accompanied by her companion, she descended to her apartments again, and when that meal was dispatched sent for the Turkish officer in command of the tower, Hassan, El Moola.

And when that worthy arrived, eagerly she questioned him.

"There is a battle?"

"I think there is."

"Ismail Bey has attacked the Montenegrans' position in the Duga Pass?"

"Such was his intention, I believe," the Turk replied, cautiously.

"And has any courier arrived from the scene of action since the attack began?"

The Moslem shook his head.

"No message to say whether the attempt has succeeded or failed?"

"None, lady; but there is scarcely a doubt that the attack will succeed. Our forces outnumber the insurgents ten to one."

"You will let me know as soon as any news arrives?"

"Yes, lady," and then the Turk withdrew, not sorry to escape from the cross-questioning.

Again the ladies resumed their watch upon the roof of the tower. Slowly the hours passed away. They heard the sounds of the fierce cannonading which heralded Mukhtar Pasha's last desperate attack on the Montenegrans' position, and then all was silent.

"It is over," the countess murmured, glancing at the sun, now fast sinking to his nightly couch in the bosom of the Adriatic. If the Turks have triumphed a helpless prisoner I must remain in this tower, but if they have failed, then there may be a chance for me to escape."

And while the two were discussing the prospect, all of a sudden from the dark forest which veiled the northern road, came a rabble rout, horsemen first, flying for their lives, the teamsters and wagoners of the Turkish force, ever the first to fly the field when fortune goes against the army they journey with. Then followed the beaten soldiery, begrimed with powder and smoke, many of them wounded, and all telling only too plainly by their general appearance the sad story of disaster and defeat.

"They are beaten!" the countess cried; "no common defeat either, for these fleeing, panic-stricken fugitives are no longer an army; they are but a rabble!"

The appearance of the Turkish officer, Hassan, interrupted the conversation.

Briefly he announced that Mukhtar Pasha had been defeated, and that the insurgents might be expected in the neighborhood of the tower at any moment, and therefore he must request that the two ladies retire to their apartments as it would be necessary to prepare for an attack.

The ladies complied without remonstrance, which, under the circumstances, they felt would be useless.

Night came; supper was served; the meal dispatched and then again the two prisoners fell to speculating upon the chance of release.

"Depend upon it, your Scarlet Captain husband will rescue you yet!" Alexina exclaimed, full of confidence.

But, as if in gloomy denial, into the apartment stalked the dark renegade, Ismail Bey!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RENEGADE'S ESCAPE.

SATAN always favors his own, they say, and if what men said was true—if the stories told of the dark deeds of the renegade were not all lies, then the Author of all Evil never had a more devoted subject.

And so, aided by his Satanic majesty, for Heaven surely would never have stooped to aid one so lost to virtue and honor as the false Montenegrans, the dark-browed renegade escaped from the trap so cunningly arranged by the Scarlet Captain in the wild mountain pass, which in its spring had caught the entire Moslem detachment from gallant Osman Pasha down to the meanest varlet in the ranks, the chief, Ismail Bey, alone excepted.

The renegade had not forgotten his early training amid the hills of Montenegro, and so he had taken advantage of the diversion of all eyes from him, while the details of the surrender were being arranged, to slip into the shel-

ter of the wooded ravine, through which the guide had escaped, and from that wild spot fled over the backward track.

Twenty minutes after the time, when like a midnight murderer with the brand of Cain upon him, conquered, beaten Ismail had crept into the thicket, his absence was discovered, and instant chase given.

Too late!

As good a mountaineer as any man in the victorious band, although it was long years since his feet had trodden the rude and rough defiles, the baffled renegade had doubled upon his track like a hunted fox; while as fierce, truly, as the savage hounds who run the fox to earth were the agile-limbed mountain-men who followed so close upon the track of the fugitive.

But, the pursuit was all in vain; Ismail gained the plain in safety, after night set in.

From his covert on the hillside he had watched the closing hour of the bloody fight which had brought such disaster to gray Mukhtar Pasha and his well-trained legions.

With many a curse and frown the Turkish general had witnessed the sudden assault of the Montenegrans upon the Turkish artillery—saw the guns belch forth their leaden hail upon his own men—beheld the crimson tide of battle turn and run counter to the fortune of the Turkish host.

And when the sun sunk slowly down to its bed in the bosom of the swelling Adriatic, the well-appointed, well-trained host whom he had led forth that morn, flushed with the consciousness of an easy triumph over the simple foe whom they despised, was a beaten rabble, fleeing for life, all semblance even of an army gone.

No wonder that the swarthy renegade cursed in wild despair, and that in his heart grew up a fierce desire for the blood of the man who had accomplished all this.

And that man was the Slasher of Scutari—the Scarlet Captain!

Away with the thin device that the schoolboy—Prince Nicholas of Montenegro, commanded the mountain host!

No, this unknown adventurer—this Scarlet Captain—was the man whose genius had planned, and whose skillful right arm had struck the blow.

What Russian prince—what mighty man of war was he, who disguised his name and purpose under so fanciful a title?

The renegade could not solve the riddle for all his guessing, and his only consolation was to shake his clenched fist at the now-shadowed plain where the conquerors were preparing to go into camp, and cry aloud to the silent night, his only witness.

"Your turn now, accursed adventurer, but mine will come! Some day my star will be in the ascendant and you will be in my hands, and then a long rope and a short prayer to you, even though you be the Russian Alexander's son!"

After night had darkened earth and sky the renegade, descending from his mountain perch, easily managed to evade the encampment of the victorious mountaineers, and make his way to the old tower.

Even the strongly-fortified tower had not given confidence to Mukhtar Pasha and his beaten legions, for, instead of halting by the shadow of the protecting walls, they had hurried straight on and had never tarried until they had put many miles of Albanian soil between themselves and the victorious Montenegrans.

For a time the pursuit of the beaten army had been close and fierce, but the Montenegrin leader had his army well in hand, and when fully satisfied that the victory was complete and that the Turkish host had lost all semblance of an army, he gave the word to halt.

Perhaps, like a wise man, he believed in the old Spanish proverb, "Build a bridge of silver for a flying enemy!"

The tower was strongly fortified, well garrisoned, provisioned, and able to stand a siege. As the Turkish commander, stern Mukhtar, rode past, disdaining to fly in hot haste from the scene of his inglorious defeat, like the meanest camp-follower in the host, he called aloud to Hassan upon the wall:

"Hold out for ten days and I'll have a force here that will sweep those fellows into the sea!"

"Fear not!" bold Hassan had replied. "Ten days! I'll hold the tower ten weeks!"

Old Mukhtar rode on, and Hassan hurried to prepare his guns.

He had expected an immediate attack, but up to the coming on of the darkness, he had seen nothing of the mountain victors, except that their skirmishers seemed to be lurking within the corner of a wood just to the north of the tower.

As the Turk had boasted, the old castle was strong and might laugh a siege to scorn, but if the Scarlet Captain was in command of the Montenegrin force, then for him the old tower held a prize not to be purchased with a king's ransom, and the stronghold that might defy all

the efforts of a doughty foe, yet would not be able to resist a lover's devices.

What wall so high—what moat so deep, as to defy young Cupid's spring?

The appearance of the Turkish general took every one by surprise.

From the wall Hassan had questioned some of the fugitives, but one and all had disclaimed any knowledge of the Turkish leader, and naturally, therefore, it was believed that the renegade had fallen in the fight. But now that it was plain that dark Ismail was still in the flesh, it was no wonder that he chose to shut himself up in the tower rather than follow in the flight so swiftly led by beaten Mukhtar.

The Countess of Scutari was in the tower, and fair Catherine was his prize, which rather than lose, life itself would be freely parted with.

"Man your wall well and see that the watch be diligent!" the renegade commanded. "Before the night is over we shall hear from these Montenegrans, or I am a false prophet."

"Do you think that they will dare to attack the tower?"

"By open attack, no; by secret and sudden assault, yes," Ismail Bey replied. "Who, think you, commands this insurgent army? You would never guess, man! It is the Scarlet Captain—this adventurer who married the countess!"

"He must have more lives than a cat!" the Turk exclaimed, in astonishment.

"We shall hear from him ere the night is over; so see that the sentinels are trusty."

And then the renegade sought the apartments of the countess, dark thoughts in his mind.

The tower was strong, but it might be taken, and then—his jewel wrested from him, perhaps!

CHAPTER XVIII. ISMAIL'S PURPOSE.

So sudden and abrupt the appearance of the renegade that the two ladies were fairly startled, but, warned as they had been by Hassan, of the evil fortune which had overtaken the Ottoman arms, it was easy for them to guess why the cloud rested on the face of the Turkish leader.

Well known to them was the history of the bey; that is, such history as had been made in the open light of day and was the common property of all the world; and well they understood what a terrible blow to the pride of the soldier must be his complete and utter defeat at the hands of the insurgents—his own people.

And Catherine, proud, haughty, full of the iron will of the old mountain race, could not repress a glance of exultation as she came eye to eye with the baffled man.

Ismail saw the gleam of exultation upon the beautiful face, and rage swelled within his heart.

"You have returned," Catherine at once said. "Have the insurgents fled? Does the banner of the Prophet reign supreme over the hills of Montenegro?"

Concealing the anger which burned within his veins under an icy mask, "You know that disaster and defeat have befallen the Turkish arms," he answered.

"Yes; from the roof of the tower I saw the retreat of your beaten army; and never in all my life saw I a more panic-stricken rabble."

"You are right—it was a terrible defeat," the bey confessed. "The army which this morning set out, filled with confidence, sure of an easy victory over a foe whom they despised, as an army exists no longer. The insurgents have triumphed; they have not only repulsed my attack, but they have utterly destroyed my army, and all Albania is open to their incursions if they choose to descend from their mountain fastnesses. At any moment, here in this tower, I may expect to receive notice that I am surrounded by the victorious foe, and prepare myself to answer the summons to surrender."

Again the look of exultation on the face of the countess. Assistance was near at hand, and release from her captivity must soon come!

The renegade noted this look, and a sinister smile passed over his dark face.

"Already you see your prison doors swing open, I presume," he said, a mocking accent in his voice. "Perhaps the prospect will be even more cheering when I tell you that the adventurer you married yesternight still lives; he escaped the sabers and bullets of my followers, escaped the perils of the fearful leap from the roof of the tower into the sea, and is now holding a high command in the insurgent force. To his cunningly-devised snare, into which I was entrapped by a false guide, is to be attributed the terrible disaster that has come upon the Turkish arms to-day. At any moment this Scarlet Captain may knock with his mailed hand upon the gates of this tower and demand his wife, backing his request with the whole strength of the notorious Montenegrin army."

Catherine understood full well that it was

for no good purpose the renegade had made this revelation, and therefore she repressed the joyous exclamation springing so freely to her lips and waited to hear further.

"And so great a dandar am I—so weak in wit—so disheartened and dismayed by this terrible defeat that has befallen me, that, instead of fleeing in hot haste like the rest, I wantonly throw myself into this old tower; shut myself up here in order that the Scarlet Captain may surround me with his conquering army, so that when the tower surrenders, to grace his triumph he may have Ismail Bey, a helpless prisoner, in his hands."

"Ah, but you do not intend to surrender!" the countess exclaimed, quickly, not for a moment deceived by the speech of the wily renegade. "You intend to hold out. The tower is strong; you know that, under your command, the garrison will resist to the last extremity. In time Mukhtar Pasha will come to your assistance, and then the Montenegrans, overwhelmed by superior numbers, will be forced back again to the shelter of their mountains."

"You are keen-witted, countess; a true woman in guessing!" the officer exclaimed. "You are quite right; I have shut myself up in the tower—like a rat in a trap, perhaps—for exactly the same reason that your adventurer husband, this Scarlet Captain, attacks it. You are here! You, the Countess of Scutari, the prize for which both he and I are striving. He knows that you are here, and he will strain every nerve to either take the tower or force it to surrender, but I am here also, and while life remains the tower shall hold out. Within ten days I shall be relieved. Mukhtar Pasha will return with an army large enough to drive these insurgents through the Duga Pass, even were they twice as strong as they are."

"My fate then depends upon the strength of the tower; you still design to make me your victim if you can!" Catherine spoke calmly, if not with indifference.

"Yes!" retorted the renegade, fiercely. "It is not in my nature to retreat from a task upon which I have set my heart. Years ago, Catherine, I determined that you should be mine. Your father drove me with hot curses and hard blows from the Montenegrin land; in a foreign clime I found refuge, but your face lived ever in my memory, and as I rose slowly from rank to rank I joyed, for each step brought me nearer to you. And now that the end is gained—that you are fairly in my power, is it to be supposed that I will tamely yield you at the first demand? Oh, no! Let this adventurer batter away at the tower; the walls are strong and our artillery good, and even if the worst comes to the worst—if the walls crumble beneath my feet, and I find that the place is doomed to fall—why, then, Catherine, there is a dagger in my belt, a strong arm to wield it, and it will find a sheath in your heart. But while life remains you are mine!"

The countess had listened with a frightened color to this bloodthirsty speech. That it was no idle boast the dark life-history of the renegade fully proved, but the Montenegrin woman qualified not. Not with an unblinking smile she faced the false son of the old mountain land.

"Ismail Bey, or John Belina, whichever you may be pleased to term yourself, you are a man used to deeds of blood. In time to come the page of history will speak of you as one who stained the renown of a gallant soldier by fearful acts worthy only of a savage. I am only a weak woman, yet you shall find that the warrior heart of my old race beats within my breast. You have said that you would sooner kill me than let me go free: I believe you. I can readily understand from your past career that you will not shrink from any act, no matter how bloody. And now listen to me; young as I am, with all the bright, beautiful world before me, if the tower holds out, rather than become your prey I would scorn to live; death would be preferable to life linked with you."

The renegade listened in silence, and as he was about to reply, the shrill blare of the trumpets rung on the air without the tower.

Already the Scarlet Captain knocked!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MONTENEGREAN DEMAND.

CAREFUL watch and ward had the Turks kept from the top of the old tower since the last of the beaten legions fled by it. The sun went down and the moon rose; great in all her glorious beauty, the pale queen of night flooded the heavens with her silver light. No better protection against a surprise could the defenders of the old tower have had than this.

Afar off the dark line of the pine-clad mountains rose, the forest trees looking black against the hills; and where the forest swept forward to embrace the winding road which northward led, the Moslems felt sure the insurgent skirmishers lurked.

The old tower was very strong, and owing to its commanding position was justly held to be almost impregnable. There was no position within cannon range where attacking guns

could be mounted that was not commanded by the artillery of the tower.

Little wonder, then, that stern old Mukhtar, in his hasty flight, had ordered Hassan El Moola to hold the tower for ten days until he could procure reinforcements, and had then rode on, perfectly satisfied with the assurance of the Turkish leader that he could hold the tower ten times that number of days.

And wily Ismail Bey! no fool was he to seek refuge in the old dark castle if he had not felt perfectly satisfied that it was proof against all the power that the insurgents could bring to bear upon it.

The watch had been doubled and each and every man instructed to give an alarm upon the slightest sign of danger.

The Turks feared a sudden assault; they did not believe that the Montenegrans would attempt to take the tower by a regular siege.

But the evening was well advanced before the insurgents gave the slightest sign that they were in strong force right around the tower, and then, all of a sudden, their trumpets sounded; the clear-toned bugles answered each other from point to point, from the sea-shore of the Adriatic far south of the tower to the wooded defiles to the north, the entrance to the Duga Pass.

It was plain that the castle was completely surrounded.

And with the challenge of the trumpets, forth from the woods north of the tower came a small body of horsemen, bearing a flag of truce.

Ismail Bey had hurried to the outer walls at the first sign of alarm, and his dark brow knitted as he beheld the flag of truce ride on.

"Now by Allah and the Sacred Tomb at Mecca!" he cried, "do these dogs of Christians think with a word and a breath to frighten us from our position? The intoxication of their one single victory has turned their brains. Train me a gun on yonder troop; first we'll hear their speech, but if they dare to be insolent, and forget the respect due to us, their masters, we'll send them to their prophet, the devil, in a storm of iron hail!"

And no empty boast this, for small respect the ruthless renegade had for the courtesies of war when dealing with the subjects of his august master, the sultan of Turkey.

The gunner trained the piece to bear full on the little body of horsemen, and as they advanced moved it to correspond with their positions.

So clear the light of the moon that all the scene was as light as by day, except that the gun and gunner, hidden by the shadow cast by the wall, were concealed from sight.

Steadily on rode the little band, bearing the Montenegrin flag of truce, little dreaming of the danger which threatened them, despite the sacred nature of their mission, at the hands of the barbarous foe.

A hundred feet or so from the wall the party halted, and the trumpeter with a loud blast signaled the attention of the defenders of the tower.

The officer in command of the detachment was well known to the renegade, for it was the American adventurer, Robert Lauderdale.

Eagerly dark Ismail looked for the figure of the Scarlet Captain amid the men of the little detachment, and if the "Slasher of Scutari" had been there, to no word would the evil-minded renegade have listened—no word would he have spoken, save the single command to the old gunner, "fire!"

But the man the renegade so fiercely hated, was not with the flag of truce; and so, curbing his anger as well as he could, Ismail prepared himself to listen.

The renegade stood half in the shadow, so that his person was concealed from the Montenegrans, who had no suspicion that their bitterest foe had found refuge within the old castle.

Who commands this tower?" asked Lauderdale, after the trumpet had sounded its loud blast.

"Answer him, Hassan," ordered Ismail.

The Turk at once advanced to the edge of the rampart.

"I do, Hassan El Moola."

The American saluted him.

"I, Robert Lauderdale, colonel in the army of Montenegro, as the representative of Nicholas, Prince of Montenegro, by whose army you are now entirely surrounded, do hereby demand the surrender of this castle. Generous conditions are offered; the garrison will be allowed to depart with all the honors of war, the officers to retain their side-arms."

"Ask him if all within the tower will be allowed to depart, Hassan," the renegade said.

The Turk put the question as he was bidden.

The American understood the trap at once.

"All who hold allegiance to the Turkish sultan," he replied, "but if there are any within the tower, of Montenegrin or Albanian birth, who do not desire to cross the Turkish frontier, then their wishes must be respected, and they must be left free to go where they will."

"Tell him that the betrothed bride of Ismail Pasha, the Countess of Scutari, is within

the tower, and ask what disposition is to be made of her," Ismail said to the Turk.

To the flag of truce Hassan put the question.

"The Countess of Scutari, the lady whom you call the betrothed bride of Ismail Bey, is the legally wedded wife of a gallant soldier serving under the Montenegrin flag. I myself was present at the ceremony and can bear witness to the fact of the marriage; and therefore the countess cannot be allowed to accompany the Turkish force."

"Tell him that the countess is a ward of the Turkish sultan, and that no marriage that she may contract can be legal without his consent," again the renegade prompted Hassan to say.

"The Countess of Scutari a ward of the sultan!" cried the American in scorn; "that is a claim that all Montenegro disputes, and it is to settle the question of the sultan's authority that we are here in arms this night. Montenegro does not admit that the Turkish sultan has power to rule over a single inch of her free mountain soil, or to sway, even by so much as a hair, the destinies of the meanest creature that breathes her mountain air."

"Hot words, young man, hot words!" cried Ismail, abruptly, advancing to the edge of the rampart as he spoke.

The appearance of the renegade was a genuine surprise to all the Montenegrin detachment. They had supposed the beaten general to be wandering, like an outcast wolf, in the mountain defiles, and had no idea that he had succeeded in gaining the shelter of the tower.

"You are over bold, you native of a foreign clime, you adventurer, to thrust yourself into a quarrel which concerns you not," the renegade continued, sternly. "What is it to you whether Turkey's sultan rules over Montenegro or not? What is it to you this difference between a ruler and his subjects? By the Prophet! you are either as bold as the lion, lord of the African deserts, or else foolhardy in your courage to thus expose yourself to my wrath. You and your friend, cut-throat adventurers both! have dared to interfere between Ismail Pasha and his cherished plans, and now you come under a flag of truce, to beard the tiger in his den. You demand the surrender of this tower and my answer shall be written in blood. Stand to your gun, Achmet!"

And the gunner with lighted match, glowing in the moonlight, sprung to his piece.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ASSAULT ON THE TOWER.

AT the breach of the gun, trained to bear directly upon the little party clustered under the folds of the Montenegrin flag of truce, stood the swarthy Turk, Achmet, reported to be the best gunner in the Moslem service, the lighted match in his hand, awaiting the signal from the renegade to launch forth the deadly storm of iron hail which would surely carry destruction to the little band who had thus dared to boldly beard the lion in his den.

And yet, the Montenegrans quailed not, although they fully realized that their lives depended upon the caprice of the wily and unscrupulous Ismail Bey.

"And now, my doughty warriors, what is to prevent me from giving you to the death your insolence so richly merits?" the bey cried. "I have but to lift my finger and it is your passport to eternity."

"We are under the protection of a flag of truce," the American replied, as calm as though all this was a mere holiday parade and not the stern reality of bloody war.

"A flag of truce!" sneered Ismail; "and under what rule of war does the commander of regular troops recognize the flag of truce of a band of brigands, for such ye are, and nothing better?"

"You will not respect the flag, then?"

"No; a few minutes only I give you to prepare for the other world, and then, by Allah! I'll hurl your souls to perdition!" cried the renegade, fiercely.

"Such an outrage would receive the condemnation of all the civilized world!"

"Bah! what care we for the world? You are rebels—traitors in arms against your lawful sovereign; foolishly you have trusted yourself into my hands, and by the Prophet! I swear I'll make such an example of you, that all Montenegro shall tremble from the Adriatic to the mountains when she hears of the punishment I shall inflict!"

"Tarry awhile!" cried the American, coolly; "crook not your little finger for a few moments as a signal to your gunner to apply the match; pause and reflect. Are the lives of the Turkish officers and men, a thousand or more, captured in this last fight and now prisoners in the hands of the Montenegrans, of any value to you?"

Quietly and coolly the question had been put, but the force of it struck all the hearers instantly.

The American had the Turk upon the hip.

Ismail did not reply, but glared in sullen rage at the bold speaker.

"Prince Nicholas of Montenegro is no child to be trifled with," the American continued. "He has a goodly number of your men in his

hands, among them some officers of high rank; Osman Pasha is one of them. Give your signal to your gunner—blaze away with your cannon, send us headlong to the other world, and when the morning dawns, every tree within sight of this old tower will bear witness to the vengeance of the prince, my master, in the shape of a strangled Turk dangling from the end of a long rope. We will die like men and soldiers, but your comrades, in retaliation, will be hanged like thieves and murderers."

"Your leader will never dare!" cried Ismail, in rage, for he perceived that the bold speaker had the best of it.

"Oh, will he not?" retorted the American, scornfully; "try him and see. I was doubtful about how a flag of truce would be received after the terrible thrashing we gave you so lately, but the prince quickly reassured me.

"If they fire upon the flag," said he, "I'll hang every Turkish scoundrel within my lines at sunrise! Tell them so if they manifest a disposition to be ugly."

"The life of Osman Pasha is worth more than all the men in the Montenegrin land!" the renegade cried, sullenly, "and lest your leader, blinded in the intoxication of his temporary triumph, should be tempted to harm him, I will reconsider my determination and let you go unharmed; but send me no more flags, for I give you fair warning I will fire upon the next one the instant it gets within range. You have our answer to your insolent demand; while one stone remains upon another, or a soldier is left to man the walls, we shall hold out."

The American bowed his head, the trumpet sounded, and the Montenegrin party rode off, none of them sorry, to tell the truth, that they were well out of their perilous position.

And then the renegade and his men prepared for the attack which they felt sure would come at break of day.

It was plain that the tower was entirely surrounded, and that the Montenegrans were taking advantage of the darkness to get their guns in position so as to be ready to open fire with the first ray of light in the morning.

When the wily renegade had selected the tower as the abode of the Countess of Scutari, he had taken all due precautions. It had been so well strengthened and armed that the bey felt secure in its power to resist any force the Montenegrans could bring against it. That force could not exceed three thousand men. Within ten days, or two weeks at the outside, Mukhtar Pasha could easily gather together an army of eight or ten thousand men in Albania, by drawing from the fortified posts, and when Mukhtar advanced, the Montenegrans must either fight or fly.

And as the midnight hour drew nigh, the watchful ears of the renegade caught what seemed to be the moving of heavy artillery. Instantly he guessed what the insurgents were up to; they were getting their guns in position.

Under the cover afforded by the dark woods the Montenegrans were arranging their forces.

"Shell the woods!" was Ismail's command. "Elevate the guns and get as great a range as possible. Give them a shell every ten minutes in a half circle from sea to sea."

And thus the action began.

All night long the screaming shells whistled through the air. Not a gun replied from the Montenegrans' side; it was plain the insurgents were endeavoring to mask their position.

Morning came at last, and two hours after daybreak the attack began.

Despite the random shelling of the previous night the Montenegrans had succeeded in getting their guns into position, and opened a heavy fire upon the tower.

Until late in the afternoon the artillery duel lasted, but the advantages were decidedly on the side of the besieged.

Two of the Montenegrin guns had burst, three had been disabled by the fire from the tower; a severe loss to the insurgents, for they were not rich in artillery, and they had not succeeded in making a breach in the walls, although the old gray stones showed plainly that the fire had been a severe one.

"Aha!" cried Ismail, in triumph, as the assailants' fire gradually slackened, and gun after gun withdrew from the contest, "unless you are gifted with wings like birds, my bold fellows, you will never take the old tower of Dulcigno!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A FEARFUL FATE.

AGAIN the night had come, and peace once more reigned around the old tower.

In the large apartment, the windows of which overlooked the sea, the two ladies sat. All day long they had been confined, close prisoners, to their apartments, a sentinel posted at the door by Ismail's orders.

Briefly he had condescended to explain his reasons for the precaution to the two ladies.

"We are about to have a battle," he said; "these bold gentlemen without are going to test the goodness of our artillery and the strength of our walls. Hard knocks will be given and

received; ball and shell are no respecters of persons, and if either of you venture to the walls, you are as likely to be hit as any soldier of the garrison, and I feel too much interest in you to permit you to expose yourself to needless danger."

Vainly the two protested that they were willing to take the chances; the renegade listened to them with an icy smile, but posted his sentinel all the same.

"Oh, no!" he had muttered, as the sound of the guns called him to the walls, and he had hurriedly quitted the apartment occupied by the two; "no random shot—no exploding shell, although aimed by the hands of your countrymen, fair countess, shall tear you from me; even grim death is a rival I defy!"

And so in the seclusion of their apartment the ladies had remained all day long, listening to the sounds of war.

For a time the cannonading had been quite fierce, and the prisoners, their hopes rising and sinking with each fresh discharge, speculated vainly as to which way the fortunes of the day were tending.

From the windows of the apartment they commanded a view of the sea only, and therefore were debarred from all sight of the contest.

But when the sun began to sink in the blue waters of the Adriatic, fairest of all the European seas! and the fierce artillery duel gradually slackened, hope sprung up afresh within the hearts of the prisoners.

"Do you not see that the fire is slackening?" Catherine exclaimed. "My life upon it, the guns of the castle have been silenced by the Montenegrine batteries—a breach, perhaps, made in the walls, and soon the storming-party will advance to the attack, and then we shall be rescued from the power of this base renegade!"

"Pray Heaven that your guess is truth!" Alexina replied, fervently.

And then the two waited and watched.

Slowly the sun sunk, disappeared, all robed in crimson, gold and Tyrian purple, and the shades of eventide began to gather.

The stillness of death reigned without. No sounds of war now, no hoarse clang of trumpets, loud roll of drums, nor deep-mouthed belching of roaring cannon.

The hearts of the two girls seemed to still within their bosoms as they lingered in this awful suspense. And as the sable gloom of night descended on the earth, into the apartment came servants bearing lights, and at their back walked the Turkish leader.

A single glance at the stern and haughty face of Ismail Bey, and both the prisoners, with womanly apprehension, realized that the fortunes of the day had gone against the assailants. The castle had resisted the attack.

The servants retired, and the renegade, coolly helping himself to a chair, surveyed the hapless maidens.

"I come to satisfy your curiosity," he said.

"Yes!" Catherine was as distant and haughty as though for the last eight hours she had not been stretched upon the rack of apprehension.

"The Montenegrines opened fire on us early this morning and the attack lasted until two hours ago. It was signally unsuccessful. Their guns failed to make any impression upon our works, while on our part, our artillery inflicted severe damage upon them. In fine, we have silenced their fire and compelled them to withdraw from the attack; therefore, countess, give up all hope of rescue, for you are as securely in my power as though you were in my palace at Constantinople."

Catherine did not reply, but with a look of haughty contempt turned away and gazed out of the window upon the dark surface of the swelling wave.

With the coming of the night the storm-king had marshaled his battalions across the sky, hiding the light of the moon, and not even a single star had strength to pierce the dark vail.

As dark as that stormy sky was the future of the Scutari countess.

"For a week or ten days this rabble can amuse themselves by battering away at these old walls, but strong as they are old," Ismail continued, "and then Mukhtar Pasha will bring up his legions and we'll sweep like a swarm of locusts over the Montenegrine land!"

"Perhaps!" Catherine exclaimed, scornfully, provoked into speech. "When heaven levels the Duga Pass, when she makes the mountains of Montenegro as flat as the Albanian plains, takes the bold heart and the strong arm of the mountaineer from him and reduces him to the condition of a peaceful shepherd, like the slaves of the South, the passive subjects of Turkish tyranny, then, and not till then, will the crescent sweep in triumph over the mountain land!"

The bey had watched the face of the inspired girl, kindled into fresh beauty by her excitement, with an admiring eye.

"By Allah!" he cried, "you are worthy to be a warrior's bride. Every word you speak increases my admiration. And now that all barriers between us are removed, I pant with

impatience for the hour which makes you mine."

"That hour will never come!" cried the countess, quickly.

"Be not so sure of that!" Ismail replied, a dark and scornful smile of triumph upon his face. "All obstacles between us are removed; I can make you mine now with a free conscience. You are the ward of the sultan, his subject, and I, as his officer, have power to bestow your hand whether you are willing or not. To-morrow our marriage-rites shall be celebrated."

"To-morrow!" Catherine exclaimed in horror.

"Ay, to-morrow," the renegade answered, firmly. "It is useless to idle time away; a week, a month, or a year hence, will find you no more willing."

"But you forget I am already married."

"Did I not say that all obstacles were removed? This adventurer who, like a knight of the olden time, terms himself the Scarlet Captain, like the foolhardy ruffian that he was, has risked his life once too often. He fell during the attack to-day."

The countess had listened incredulously, and the Turkish commander perceived at once that his story was doubted.

"You do not believe it?"

"No."

"When our marriage rites are solemnized to-morrow, perhaps you will then."

"Such a ceremony would be only a mockery!"

"Since it gives me the prize I have toiled long years to gain, I shall not complain," the renegade retorted, coolly.

"You will not dare to commit such an outrage!" Catherine exclaimed, spiritedly, all her angry blood flaming in her veins. "Even the sultan, your master, careless as he is of the world's opinion, will hesitate before he sanctions such an infamous attack upon the descendant of one of the oldest houses in Europe! All the Christian world will surely take up arms to avenge such an affront upon a helpless woman!"

"That remains to be seen," the renegade replied, not in the least disturbed by the threat. "At present the hour is mine, and, let the future bring what it will, by Allah! I will improve the opportunity! To-morrow makes you mine for this world, although the act sends me to the other straightway!"

And then the trickster withdrew, leaving behind him consternation, if not despair.

Dark as the stormy night without was the future now to Scutari's countess.

CHAPTER XXII.

A BRAVE DEVICE.

"Oh, he will never dare!" Alexina exclaimed.

"You think that he will?"

Catherine bowed her head sadly.

"But such a terrible outrage!"

"Look at the man's past life and see how many vile deeds lie at his door," the countess responded. "Times have changed, too, now; we live not in the ancient days when the wrongs of a helpless woman borne abroad on the free winds would bring gallant men from all parts of the world to espouse her cause and avenge her wrongs. We are here, closely confined in this old castle, surrounded by men devoted to this villain. I see plainly that he has made up his mind to make me his prey, at all hazards; he has counted the cost, and determined to risk everything to gain his purpose. He will force me into this marriage in spite of all that I can do; neither prayers nor threats will turn him from his purpose, and once the marriage is accomplished what can I do? He will tell his story to the world, and swear that I willingly agreed to the union—have supple tools to back his false oath; he will keep me in close confinement, and you, too, my poor Alexina, for you know too much to be allowed to go freely. The only hope I had was that the Montenegrines might be able to capture the castle."

"But do you believe his story that the attack has failed?"

"Yes; there I think he spoke the truth; everything confirms it," the countess replied, sadly. "There was ample time after the cannonading ceased for the attacking force to assault if they had succeeded in making a breach in the walls. No, he spoke the truth; the tower was too strong and the attack failed."

"A second may be more successful."

Naturally light-hearted and sanguine Alexina grasped at every chance.

"Perhaps; but you forget that my fate will be sealed in the morning."

"Do you believe that the Scarlet Captain is dead?" asked the foster-sister, abruptly.

"No, I do not; the story was but a ruse on the part of this evil-minded man to make me think myself utterly helpless."

"If the Scarlet Captain is alive, then, dear Catherine, you will be rescued!" Alexina cried, confidently. "He loves you; I am sure of it; and he will move heaven and earth to save you."

The countess smiled.

"Silly child, what can this poor young man, this nameless adventurer, whose only fortune is probably his sword, do against the power of this Turkish bey, the governor of Albania, and one of the highest officers in the Turkish service? A favorite, too, of the new sultan, I have heard, although when I heard the matter discussed, I little thought that Ismail Bey was my renegade cousin, John Belina, or that within so short a time he would exercise such a powerful influence over my fortunes."

"The Scarlet Captain loves you, and that love will give him power to baffle even the schemes of so great a man as this wicked renegade!" Alexina persisted.

The countess shook her head.

"You do not believe it?"

"No; you are a romantic child, and this problem is one of real life. I married this unknown gentleman hastily, foolishly perhaps. I was desperate—ready to adopt any course to defeat the plans of this base villain, who had so cunningly entrapped me. I thought that the marriage would terminate the persecution, but it has proved otherwise."

Alexina approached and twined her arms caressingly about Catherine.

"Oh, my poor sister, the future seems dark indeed."

"Yes, like yonder sky no star shines through the clouds, but there is one way to escape from the pursuit of this man, who is more hateful to me than the meanest crawling reptile that exists upon the earth."

"And that is?"

"Were I dead, I should be free!" Gloomy was the tone of the girl but full of determination.

"Oh, Catherine, you would not die?"

"And why not? Is not death preferable to a life linked to a man whom I abhor?"

"But death—and you are so young—the future seemed all so bright."

"Yes, but my fortunes have changed, and I would gladly welcome death rather than the fate that now lies before me. My mind is fully made up. Unless kind Heaven, who now seems to frown so bitterly upon me, sends some means of escape, if I am forced into this hated union, sooner than submit myself a helpless victim to this vile traitor, I will leap from yonder window into the sea. Rather a grave beneath the blue waters of the Adriatic than life with Ismail Bey!"

"Oh! it would be a fearful leap!"

And the two girls, with sad faces approached the window and gazed out upon the stormy night. Black as ink was earth, sea and air; dark and sullen the rain-drops fell upon the surface of the troubled waters. So dark the night that one could scarcely see a hand's breadth before.

The sullen swash of the waves below, beating upon the rocks whereon the castle was founded, came audibly to the ears of the imprisoned ladies, and to their gloomy imagination, forcibly impressed by the time and the hour, the doleful sound seemed like the wail of some unquiet spirit.

Alexina shuddered as she looked down into the gulf, dark as the shades of hell.

"Oh, Catherine, to find death there! It would be too horrible!" she exclaimed, her soul full of terror.

"To find death anywhere is dreadful unless one is weary of life, and then death comes like slumber to the tired worker. To die is but to sleep."

"The very thought makes me sick at heart."

"The prospect before me is so dark and hateful that I am sick to the soul whenever I think of it, and yet, try as I will, I cannot keep my thoughts from the subject. See in what a terrible situation I am placed. If no unforeseen accident—and it seems hopeless to look for one—occurs, I shall be sacrificed to the fierce passion of this hated renegade; then naught but death is left to me, for death under such circumstances would indeed be a blessing; but, if I should escape, if heaven at the eleventh hour should interpose to save me, what then lies before me? I shall be free from the power of this vile man, but foolishly I have bound myself to an unknown adventurer; I am the wife of the Scarlet Captain. Who is he? do you know, or I, or anybody else? No; he is a soldier of fortune; he seems like a gentleman, but yet he may be far otherwise. How will he use the power which, willfully, recklessly, I gave him? He has sworn never to claim the rights of a husband; the ceremony was to be a marriage only in name, but what security have I that he will keep his word? Why did he marry me? What was his object? Ah, Alexina, if I should escape from the power of this mongrel Turk, I fear that this Scarlet Captain might prove to be as hard a tyrant."

"Oh, no!" Alexina protested, full of confidence; "I will not believe it! He has a noble face; and then, too, my American declared that he was a prince in heart!"

The countess shook her head.

"You do not believe that he is a gentleman?"

"Oh, I do not know! Alexina, I am on a rock; relief must come soon or I shall go mad!"

Catherine exclaimed, pressing her cold hands wildly upon her burning temples, just as a missile came hurtling through the murky air without and entered the apartment.

It was an arrow, with a note firmly affixed to it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHAT THE DARING DARED.

THE two ladies started back in alarm. At first they thought that the arrow was a missile aimed at their own fair persons, but the bold and skillful hand which had shot the bolt had aimed carefully. It had been hurled from a cross-bow, one of the old-time weapons, which, before the era of gunpowder, was a favorite with the men of the mountain land, and even now, few of the mountaineers were there who could not make effective use of the primitive weapons.

Catherine was the first to discover the nature of the missile and also to discern the note wrapped so carefully around it.

"It is an arrow and with a note affixed to it!" she cried, springing forward to pick it up. "Heaven has not entirely deserted us!"

With eager hands the countess tore the note from the arrow.

It was written on the finest of paper, and wrapped so closely around the arrow that it seemed to be a part of the shaft.

The note read as follows:

"DEAR LADIES: If you desire to aid the Montenegrin cause and at the same time escape from the power of the Turkish bandit who now holds you in durance vile, tie a strong thread to the arrow and lower it from the window; you will need about fifty feet of the thread. After the arrow is lowered, wait for five minutes, or until you feel a slight tug at the thread; then pull it up. A cord will be affixed to it; pull up that also, which will convey a rope ladder to your window; fasten the ends of the ladder securely to some heavy object in the room; bear in mind that the ladder must sustain the weight of a well-armed man. Be cautious, for there is a sentinel on the roof of the tower, but his attention is mainly given to the landward side. Extinguish all the lights but one in your apartment so that the glare from the window will be removed. When the ladder is securely fastened, shake it violently for a moment so that I may understand that all is in readiness."

"(Signed) THE SCARLET CAPTAIN."

Catherine read the letter aloud, and Alexina hung upon every word with breathless eagerness.

"Aid has come at last!" she exclaimed. "Ah, Catherine, did I not tell you that this man's love would find a way to rescue you?"

"Out of the fryingpan into the fire, perhaps," the countess replied.

"But you will not refuse the aid?" Alexina asked, anxiously.

"No, oh, no! for by the act I give the tower into the hands of the Montenegrins. No matter what my fate may be, I should not hesitate for a single moment to aid my countrymen against the Turks. Aha! it will be a great triumph over this wily renegade!"

And the noble features of the countess shone with joy as she reflected how recently it was that the swarthy traitor had boasted of the strength of the tower and his ability to hold it against all force the Montenegrins could bring against it.

At once the two ladies proceeded to carry out the instructions given in the letter. They extinguished all the lights in the apartment excepting a solitary candle; this they were careful to place upon a table at the further end of the room.

"They are probably in boats below," the countess said; "they will note the extinguishing of the lights and will perceive that we understand the instructions given, and are carrying them out to the best of our ability."

"Oh, how the Turks will stare when they find that the Montenegrins have gained an entrance into the tower! It will seem like witchcraft to them."

"Yes, the first intimation of danger they receive will be the Montenegrins' shout of victory wakening them from their slumbers."

"We must be careful that the sentinel on the roof does not discover us."

"There is very little danger," the countess answered; "the night is dark and the storm patterning against the wall will hide the noise of the movement; besides the chances are great that the sentinel will never trouble himself to look to seaward; the danger against which he was placed on guard threatens from the land not from the sea."

Selecting the strongest thread in their possession they tied the end to the arrow and then carefully into the inky gulf below the arrow descended, swaying to and fro in the wild gusts of wind.

The thread was in Catherine's hand and the spool was nearly exhausted when she felt a short, quick tug—the signal that the arrow had reached the men below.

"They have it, Alexina!" the countess exclaimed, trembling with excitement. "Oh! pray to Heaven that the thread be strong enough to support the weight!"

And then again came a short, quick tug.

Catherine understood that this was a signal to draw up the thread.

Slowly and carefully she proceeded with her task. She could plainly distinguish that the weight had increased.

Anxious were the moments that intervened until the end of the slender strand reached the window.

To the thread a strong silken cord was fastened.

Eagerly the countess grasped it and, aided by Alexina, for the burden borne by the cord was somewhat weighty, began to draw it up.

To the end of the cord a strong rope was affixed; and to this succeeded the rope ladder, which, with steady hands, the two women at length grasped and drew in.

In one corner of the room, quite near to the window, was a massive book-case, curiously carved and weighing three or four hundred pounds at the least.

To this piece of furniture Catherine tied the ends of the ladder securely.

And then with a silent prayer to Heaven to aid the men who, in the teeth of the storm, were about to make the perilous attempt, the countess gave the signal that all was prepared for the dangerous performance.

The storm roared and howled without; the Turkish sentry, posted upon the roof of the tower, had found a snug corner, partially protected from the fury of the elements, and was vainly endeavoring to make himself comfortable.

Little need of a strict watch upon such a night and in such a position he thought. A bird alone could hope to reach the top of the tower.

Not a single glance then to the seaward did the sentinel cast. Crouching in his sheltered nook he cursed the evil fortune which had condemned him to the lonely watch, and sighed mournfully for the bed in the barrack-room with his more fortunate comrades.

Watching anxiously by the window, after the signal had been given that all was in readiness for the dangerous attempt, the two ladies saw the ladder suddenly tighten as though a heavy weight had been placed upon the other end.

The leader of the scaling-party had commenced the ascent.

And then in due time the head and shoulders of a man appeared in the gloomy void beneath the window.

Nimbly the well-armed soldier climbed and then, when he reached the window, agile as a monkey, he leaped into the apartment.

It was the American, Robert Lauderdale!

The countess was in a measure disappointed; she had expected to see the pale and thoughtful face of the Scarlet Captain.

"Thanks to you, ladies, we shall be able to take this strong tower which otherwise would have defied all our efforts," he exclaimed, exultingly. "This exploit will ring throughout all Europe, and to the gentleman so intimately connected with you, countess, the idea must be credited. Had it not been for the Scarlet Captain, we should never have thought of scaling the tower from the sea and at midnight."

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN ASTONISHED SENTINEL.

"AND where is he?" Alexina asked; she had waited for a moment to allow Catherine to put the question, for she saw that the natural inquiry was on the lips of the countess, but the pride of the heiress of Scutari was too great to allow her to betray her curiosity.

"He is below," the American replied; "he would have ascended first, but his brother-officers objected. There was a doubt, of course, as to the feasibility of the attempt, and his life is too precious to be lightly risked."

An expression of profound amazement appeared on Catherine's face, as she listened to the speech. Lauderdale noticed the look, but misunderstood the cause.

"Of course we were not sure that this was the window of your apartment," he explained, thinking the countess's amazement arose from the Montenegrins questioning the practicability of the bold attempt. "We fancied that we saw your faces, ladies, framed in the casement, but the night was so dark and the storm so wild, that we were not sure. Of course there was a chance that we had made a mistake, and that the arrow had fallen into the possession of some one of the Turkish officers, and that the first man up the ladder would find that foes, not friends, awaited him at the top. If you noticed, I paused just as my head reached the level of the window."

"And if instead of us you had seen the Turkish officers?" Alexina inquired, with true womanly curiosity.

"I should have leaped backward into the sea at once. It was a forlorn hope, ladies, and I was fully prepared for the worst."

"You spoke of the life of the Scarlet Captain as being too valuable to be risked in this attempt," said Catherine, unable to longer restrain her curiosity. "Is his life worth more to him than yours to you?"

"Oh, no, but to the Montenegrin cause he

is worth a hundred such men as I am," Lauderdale replied. "He has the head to plan, I only the hand to execute. Why, ladies, with a force not reaching three thousand men he has utterly defeated a Turkish army of over ten thousand, commanded, too, by three of the ablest generals in the sultan's service; in all the Turkish ranks no three better men than Ismail Bey, Mukhtar Pasha and Osman Pasha. Over ten thousand soldiers, the best troops that Turkey can boast, these three men led to invade Montenegro. One single day's fight and this powerful force has been destroyed; as an army it exists no longer. Osman Pasha is a prisoner in our hands, and over two thousand men and officers besides. Mukhtar has been forced to run in such hot haste that it is doubtful if he does not die of rage ere Albania is reached, and the great man of them all, Ismail Bey, is shut up here securely in this old tower, and now that we have succeeded in gaining an entrance, the chances are that he will be our prisoner before he is an hour older. And all this we owe to the Scarlet Captain. Is his life not valuable, then? too valuable to be risked in such a dare-devil enterprise as was the ascent of yonder ladder, with no knowledge of the reception that awaited one?"

"What is this mystery that surrounds this man?" cried Catherine, impatiently. "Who is the Scarlet Captain? What is his name? You know it well enough; why do you not tell me? Has he requested you to observe silence? Why should I, who am so deeply interested in him, be kept in the dark as to who and what he really is?"

Lauderdale laughed. The countess had spoken with true womanly impatience.

"He will be here in a moment, and you can question him yourself," he replied; "but I am wasting time, and we might be unfortunately interrupted. There are ten boats with fifty men in them swinging against the base of the tower, waiting for me to give them the signal to ascend. We had a deuce of a time to get the boats, for we only determined upon this enterprise late in the afternoon, after we had got the worst of the artillery duel and ascertained to our full satisfaction that we could make no impression at all upon the tower with our guns."

With eager haste Lauderdale had examined the manner in which the ends of the latter had been secured.

"Strong enough to hold a dozen!" he exclaimed; "let me compliment you, ladies, upon your skill!" And then hurrying to the window, he signaled to the men beneath. This accomplished, he took up a position by the door, all in readiness to prevent a surprise.

And the moment the signal reached the men without, up the ladder they came, one following the other in quick succession, all moving with stealthy caution. They were all well-armed, sabers belted to their sides, pistols in their belts and long rifles—ever the favorite weapon of the mountaineers—slung to their backs.

There was danger that a careless movement—a dash of a saber scabbard against the rocky wall—might attract the attention of the sentinel on the roof; if this were to happen, good-bye then to the surprise; the alarm would be given on the instant and all of the daring assailants who had succeeded in gaining admittance to the tower would fall an easy prey to the aroused Moslem host.

But, the darkness of the night—the moaning of the storm, the noise of the restless, ever-tossing waves lashing the base of the tower, favored the bold attempt.

Man after man ascended the ladder—a fragile thing apparently, but of great strength—and entered the apartment, until the whole of the armed force, fifty-two men in all, were gathered in the room.

The last man to enter at the window was the Scarlet Captain.

The two ladies had withdrawn into one corner of the room and stood watching the animated scene with a great deal of interest. This sudden irruption of the armed Montenegrin force meant liberty to them.

A short conference the Scarlet Captain held with the American.

"There is a sentinel without; I can hear him pacing up and down the passageway, and plainly discern the rattle of his musket as he grounds it every now and then," Lauderdale explained.

"We must take measures to secure him. Come with me to the countess; we will need her aid in the matter."

The two approached the ladies.

Briefly the Scarlet Captain explained his plan.

"There is a sentinel without, and it is necessary to either capture or kill him before we can advance," he said. "I am averse to shedding useless blood; this single man's life will not either free or enslave Montenegro; therefore I prefer rather to capture than to kill him. If you will have the kindness to knock at the door and request him to open it, he will undoubtedly do so. Not expecting a foe we can take him unawares and probably be able to

secure him almost without a struggle. The moment he is removed we will have free access to the court-yard, for with the exception of the sentinels, all the Turks have doubtless retired to rest. Our forces without are all in readiness to make a dash for the gate the moment we open it, and before the Turks will be able to collect their scattered senses, bewildered as they will be by the surprise, so totally unexpected, we will be in complete possession of the tower."

Willingly Catherine acceded to the scheme; much more than this would she have freely done for the country she loved so well.

The Montenegrans clustered in the dark corners of the room, while Catherine advanced to the door, the Scarlet Captain posting himself just by the entrance.

The countess knocked.

"Open, sir," she said; "open, please!"

The sentinel, half-blind with sleep, weary with his lonely watch, opened the door without the slightest suspicion of danger.

With the rapidity of thought the Scarlet Captain sprung upon the Turk. Clutching him by the throat with his strong hand, he dragged him into the apartment, half-strangling the man with his grip.

The door was quickly closed, the Turk disarmed, bound, and a stout Montenegrin with his knife at the throat threatened instant death at the slightest sound.

The Turk resigned himself quietly to his fate, and nothing now seemed to intervene between the Montenegrans and their objective point, the main gate to the tower.

A single lantern, hung in a niche, dimly lighted up the old stone stairway, as down it and across the dark court-yard to the guard-room by the gate, the column stole with stealthy tread.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FIGHT FOR THE TOWER.

ALONG the walls the sentinels paced their beats, and two guarded the gate.

In the center of the court-yard were two field-pieces trained to bear directly on the gate, and by the side of the guns a little squad of gunners with lighted matches, protected from the rain by rubber blankets, were squatting, some of them dozing, others busy listening to a story-teller engaged in spinning one of those long yarns in which the Oriental nations delight.

From the guard-house, too, came the sounds of conversation.

Clearly to attempt to surprise these sleepless men and capture them without exciting a general alarm, was impossible, and the Montenegrin leader perceived at a glance that the Turks were prepared for a midnight attack. The guns trained upon the gate proved this, and terrible indeed would have been the reception accorded to an attacking party attempting to pass the gate.

With the quick instinct of the born general, the Scarlet Captain perceived his opportunity. To the men clustered in the dark mouth of the staircase he gave his whispered orders, and then, with a wild yell, the Montenegrans dashed across the court-yard.

The gunners were sabered at their posts, as, in profound amazement, they sprang to their feet. The burning matches which fell from their hands were caught up at once by the Montenegrans, and applied to the guns, and with a terrible roar the battery flamed forth its storm of iron hail.

Trained upon the gate, the discharge swept away the stout barrier as easily as though it had been framed of pasteboard instead of solid oaken plank, strengthened with many a bar and bolt.

The entrance now was clear, and the Montenegrin force without, not over a thousand paces from the wall, waiting for the signal, came rushing over the ground at racing speed.

The moment the guns were discharged the assailants began to reload, while with the discharge the old tower was in an uproar.

Not a Turk within the castle but understood that an attack had begun, and snatching up his weapons hurried to the court-yard or to the walls.

Little did they dream that the foe had gained admittance to the tower.

The first squad of the Turks who rushed into the court-yard were struck down by the Montenegrans, and soon the news spread that the foe were in the castle.

A brief and bloody fight had ensued around the captured guns, the men from the guard-house boldly charging and endeavoring to recapture the pieces, but the timely arrival of the force from without decided the fight. For a few minutes the slaughter was terrible. The Turkish soldiers met their fate with stubborn heroism; but, finding that the tide of fortune had set so strongly against them, they became panic-stricken, threw down their arms and cried for mercy.

Ismail Bey had been one of the first to gain the court-yard and offer desperate resistance to the assailants, but when the Montenegrans from without came pouring through the gate-

way, he realized that the fortunes of the hour were decided, and that the evil genius which had seemed to pursue him since his advent in Montenegro, had struck him another terrible blow.

Like a demon he had fought; few men in this life who could wield a saber with the strength and skill of the renegade, and at the head of a desperate squad who, instinctively, had attached themselves to this bold swordsman, he had offered most excellent resistance to the Montenegrin attack.

Until the appearance of the desperate renegade, the struggle had been but little more than a massacre, the Moslems falling almost without resistance beneath the sabers of the mountaineers, but Ismail's determined prowess had revived their drooping spirits, and, recovering in part from their surprise, they had fought excellently.

But with the overpowering force rushing through the gate from without, even the most blood-crazed warrior realized that the fight was decided, and that to resist longer would be madness.

"Twas stout Ismail himself who gave the word.

"Save yourselves! we are beaten!" he cried.

With true Oriental fatalism he accepted the situation; it was their kismet; men cannot fight against fate.

And with the exclamation the renegade turned his back upon the fight and fled up the stairway. A few of the soldiers, who had sustained him in the desperate contest, followed his example, but in the darkness of the stairway they lost him.

The contest ended almost immediately with the retreat of Ismail.

Hassan El Moola had been knocked down and disabled early in the fight. The edge of Lauderdale's saber and the head of the bull-necked Turk had become acquainted, much to the damage of the head, thanks to the American's stout arm.

"Where is Ismail Bey?" was the first inquiry of the Scarlet Captain, after the Turks had thrown down their arms. During the fray he had been carried, despite his will, to the other side of the guns from where the renegade had made his determined stand.

"I saw him yonder, but a moment ago," Lauderdale answered, wiping away the blood from an ugly saber-cut on his cheek, which he had received from Ismail's hand in the fight. "He gave me this clip on the cheek, and then before I could return the compliment there was a rush of men between us and we were separated."

"He ran up the stairway," said one of the Montenegrans, who had happened to notice the retreat of the Moslem chief.

For a moment the two friends gazed at each other, a look of apprehension common to both their features, the same thought in their minds.

Wherefore should Ismail Bey fly to the interior of the tower?

There were no outlets of escape in that direction; he could not hope to gain egress from the tower by flying to the walls or roof unless indeed he intended to emulate the example of the Scarlet Captain and take a leap from the roof into the sea. He must surrender at last, why not surrender now?

The Countess of Scutari!

She was in her lonely apartment in the tower; no means of defense, no protector. Ismail Bey, baffled and defeated, his army destroyed, his prestige as a general seriously impaired, and now fated to fall into the hands of the men he hated and feared too, for was he not a renegade to the mountain race? might he not in this moment of despair attempt to rob the victor of the prize of the victory?

CHAPTER XXVI.

A BRAVE WOMAN.

WHEN crafty Ismail, brave as the wolf and full as cruel, had seen that further resistance was useless, quick to his mind came thoughts of the Countess of Scutari safe in her apartment in the tower. The game for the present was ended, and he had lost. No hope—no chance to retrieve the disastrous fortunes of the hour!

The prize—the glorious woman whom he had toiled so hard to gain—was wrested from him.

What now remained for him?

Yield himself tamely into the hands of the men, fresh in whose memories was the long record of oppression? What mercy could he hope for, he who himself had shown none?

No! Like Samson, if he must fall, he would give the victors occasion to regret the moment of triumph.

"Never will I yield myself a prisoner to grace the victorious march of this unknown adventurer!" he cried, as with hasty strides he mounted the stairway. "Better death at once, and by my own hand, but before I give that blow, I'll have one stroke for vengeance!"

Straight then to the apartment of the Countess of Scutari he hurried.

Blood was in his heart and eyes.

"If not for me, then for death," he muttered, his firm hand tightly clutching the hilt of his saber, crimson with Montenegrin blood.

He reached the door of the apartment, dashed it open and entered.

The two ladies were upon their knees in one corner of the room, with tearful eyes supplicating the God of battles to give the favor of His smile to the bold mountaineers who were striking so stoutly for their native land.

The wild entrance of the desperate man, stained with the blood of the fight, his gleaming saber flashing in his hand, brought the two girls to their feet in quick apprehension.

One look at the angry features of the baffled bey was sufficient to reveal to the helpless women the story of the fight. The Montenegrans had triumphed evidently, but the presence of the blood-stained renegade boded no good to them.

The moment that Ismail entered the apartment, his eyes fell upon the rope-ladder affixed to the window.

"May all the fiends seize ye!" he cried, in wrath; "it was through you, then, that this accursed Scarlet Captain gained admittance to the tower! Now, by Allah! why should I not lop off your heads at a single stroke?"

A step the infuriated man took toward the two girls, his uplifted saber gleaming threateningly in the air.

But Scutari's countess came of a heroic race, and was not unprovided for such an emergency. Quick as the thought she plucked a revolver from amid the folds of her dress and leveled it full at the head of the vicious intruder.

"Stand back!" she cried, in clear, ringing tones, "I would not have your blood upon my head, but if you attempt to advance I will fire!"

There was no mistaking the strength of the determination so evident in both the girl's face and voice.

And to die—die by a woman's hand—was such a fate to be the end of the great Ismail Bey?

The renegade ground his teeth in rage. He had chanced upon an evil time, since he had marched his forces over the border and invaded his native land. And now to be set at naught by a woman—the woman, too, whom he had destined for his prey; the thought was galling in the extreme.

To her, too, he could ascribe the loss of the tower, for now the mystery of the sudden appearance of the Montenegrans was fully explained; before, it had been a riddle which seemingly defied solution.

"Women are at the bottom of all mischief!" says a Turkish proverb. Here was no exception to the rule.

For a moment the baffled officer glared in the face of the countess; resolution was written in every feature of the beautiful countenance; a single motion might cost him his life, and he certainly shrank from the thought of dying by the hand of a woman.

And at this critical moment there resounded the noise of hurrying feet upon the stairs. The hunters sought their prey.

Ismail's intent had been to slay the countess, and then cast himself from the window into the sea beneath; there was a bare chance that he might escape with life from the perilous attempt; but the ladder now afforded him a more easy means.

"Countess, we shall meet again!" he cried, sheathing his saber and hurrying to the window. "While life remains I shall never lose the hope that one day you will be mine!"

Then he leaped lightly through the window and disappeared down the ladder.

It really seemed as if Satan did look after his own, for this was the second time within the last forty-eight hours that Ismail Bey had managed to slip out of the hands of the men who were so anxious to lay hold of him.

A few seconds more—the noise of the rapid footsteps increasing each moment—and the Montenegrans, led by the Scarlet Captain and the American, Lauderdale, entered the apartment.

At a single glance the Montenegrin leader understood what had occurred.

The revolver, firmly grasped in Catherine's hand, and the absence of the man they sought, although the blood, still fresh upon the floor, which had dropped from his person, plainly betrayed that he had been there, told all.

"He escaped by the window!" the Scarlet Captain cried.

"Yes, only a moment ago," the countess answered.

"Pursue him at once!" the Montenegrin leader commanded.

Immediately the mountaineers flew to the task. Nimblly they descended the ladder. Below, the boats still rocked upon the bosom of the tide, but one was missing.

It was plain that the renegade had safely descended, and put to sea in the missing boat.

Instant chase was given, but the darkness of the night favored the fugitive's escape.

Until the morning light came clear and strong the search was kept up, but no Ismail Bey!

CHAPTER XXVII.

GUESSING AT THE RIDDLE.

For the second time the renegade had succeeded in making good his escape.

The Scarlet Captain had exchanged a few words only with the countess.

"Fear nothing," he had said; "you are among friends and free to go where you list, and if you will advise me when you wish to set out, I will provide an escort."

The countess had made a suitable reply, although greatly embarrassed by the peculiar situation, for this bold leader of the conquering Montenegrans was the man whom before the priest she had sworn to love, honor and obey; but, neither by word or look did the soldier refer to the relationship which existed between them.

The Scarlet Captain and Lauderdale had departed almost immediately, eager to hasten the pursuit, which was so hot, after the renegade.

Not content with pursuing the Turkish leader by sea, the Montenegrans scoured the shores of the Adriatic both to the north and south. But, eager as were the hunters after their prey, stern Ismail managed to elude the victorious mountaineers; evil as had been the star which had sat in his house-of-life since he had trodden Montenegrin soil, still it had not frowned upon him so malignantly as to give him into the hands of his foes, a helpless prisoner, to grace the triumph of the Scarlet Captain.

A squad of men had been assigned to guard the apartments of the countess, and instructions given that the ladies were to want for nothing.

And when, long after midnight, the two rescued ones sought their couch it was with thankful hearts that Heaven had listened to their prayers and, by a miracle, almost delivered them from the power of their cruel enemies.

After breakfast had been served in the morning, the American, Lauderdale, waited upon them and desired to know their commands.

The two ladies had conversed in the interim, and had decided upon their plan of action.

"If I have been informed correctly there is a large Turkish force quartered in the district where stands my late father's castle in Scutari," the countess said.

"The report is true, I believe. Selim Pasha commands the army, and it was intended to invade Montenegro from that direction, form a junction with the forces of Ismail Bey, after he had forced the Duga Pass, and then push directly for the Montenegrin capital. The defeat of the southern army will, however, destroy the plan, ably as it was formed."

"The fact of the district being occupied by Turkish troops will make it unpalatable for me to go to my home, and as long as Ismail Bey is living, I should not be safe from his pursuit, for he has a long memory and a long arm. I have escaped him this time, but I do not care to encounter such a peril again. Just on the outskirts of the town of Scutari, at the lower end of the lake, a distant relative of my sainted mother resiles. She has often pressed me to visit her. The castle she occupies is retired and if I seek shelter there my retreat will not be apt to be discovered, so if you will kindly furnish us with an escort we will set out at once."

"With the greatest of pleasure," the American replied, gallantly, "and as matters now are, luckily I can command the escort, if my presence will not be disagreeable."

Instantly the two ladies raised their voices in protestation against such an idea.

"Just a few moments ago a flag of truce came in from Mukhtar Pasha," the soldier explained. "He is encamped, with the remains of his army, just across the border of Albania. The flag bears a message from the Turkish sultan desiring a truce for the term of one month. I presume the Turks think that they can talk us into submission in that time, their hostile attempt having failed so miserably; therefore, for a month, there will be peace."

"The desire was acceded to then?"

"Certainly, at once," Lauderdale replied. "Prince Nicholas of Montenegro commands our forces in person, and as he has succeeded, thanks to the man who is so intimately connected with your fate, countess, in beating back the tide of invasion, he can afford to be generous and thus prove to all Europe that he does not seek any thing but the welfare of his country."

"Prince Nicholas here in person?" Catherine observed, thoughtfully.

"Yes, lady."

"Can I see him?"

"Certainly, if you will wait."

"Is he not here now?"

"He is busy with the Turkish envoys arranging the terms of the truce."

The face of the countess was very thoughtful just then, and it was evident that she was thinking deeply.

"Will you wait, countess?" the American

asked. "I will send a message at once if you say so."

"Where is this gentleman whom you call the Scarlet Captain?" questioned Catherine, abruptly.

"Closeted with the prince and the Turkish commissioners."

"I will not wait to see the prince now, but set out at once," she said, slowly, and evidently with a mind deeply occupied.

"The horses shall be at the door in ten minutes!" And Lauderdale at once withdrew.

The two ladies commenced to prepare for the journey.

Alexina noticed a peculiar look upon the face of the countess, and was greatly puzzled to account for it.

"What is the matter, Catherine?" she asked: "you seem disturbed."

"Do I?" the countess replied, shortly; it was plain that she was vexed.

"Yes, what is the matter?"

"Matter, enough! I have been made a fool of!"

Alexina opened her eyes wide in astonishment.

"Why, what do you mean?"

"The Scarlet Captain—"

"Yes?"

"This unknown soldier of fortune—this adventurer, who is so poor that he hasn't even a name of his own, and yet at the same time is the commander-in-chief of the Montenegrin army, and his word seems to be law to all."

"Yes, it does seem so."

"And when I ask for him he is not here, no! he is as a great man should be with the Prince of Montenegro and the Turkish envoys arranging the details of the truce!" the countess exclaimed, sarcastically.

"I do not understand!" Alexina was puzzled both by the words and the manner of her companion.

"Why, girl, do you not perceive that they have made a fool of me?" Catherine exclaimed, a spic of anger in her tone. "The Scarlet Captain is nobody, a paltry adventurer with no other fortune than his sword; such he claimed to be when we were wedded the other night—such was the story your American told, and yet, lo and behold! almost in the turning of an hour-glass he is a great general and in supreme command here in Montenegro. Your American talks of nothing but his deeds. He routed the Turkish army in the mountains; his timely arrival turned the tide of battle in the Duga Pass; 'twas his wit that devised the idea of communicating with us by means of the arrow, thus enabling the rope-ladder to be raised and an easy passage into the strong tower, which had defied their artillery, gained. My word upon it, Alexina, this Scarlet Captain is something more than he claims to be! And I am annoyed! Why should they deceive me, who have the best right to know?"

"I cannot tell," Alexina replied, simply, lost in wonder at the train of thought springing in the quick mind of the countess.

"But cunning as this Scarlet Captain thinks himself, I have guessed the riddle!" Catherine exclaimed, triumphantly.

"You have?" Alexina was all attention now.

"Yes, but for the present it must be my secret," the countess replied, laughing. "During the journey I shall question your captain shrewdly; he has wit and is devotedly attached to my hus—" the countess checked herself suddenly, and a bright blush rose in her fair cheeks and also crimsoned her forehead, "to the Scarlet Captain, I mean, but cunning as he is, he must be more than human if I do not succeed in learning something from him."

The appearance of Lauderdale, and his announcement that the horses were in readiness, put a stop to the conversation.

Ten minutes more and the journey commenced.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A MANLY DECLARATION.

A STRONG escort guarded the two ladies, and the journey to the castle just this side of the town of Scutari, nestled at the foot of the beautiful lake of the same name, was entirely without an incident worth recording.

During the journey Catherine had endeavored, but all in vain, to entrap the American officer with a series of skillfully put questions in relation to the nameless hero who, despite her will, occupied such a great share of her thoughts. The haughty heiress resented the wearing of the mask which she believed concealed from her the truth in regard to the man who from a simple adventurer had so suddenly sprung into a hero.

"It is not possible! He is something more!" she kept repeating to herself every time her inquiry was baffled.

A plain, straightforward story the American told, and not all the ingenious cross-examination of the countess could shake it in the least.

"He is a gentleman of good birth, a descendant of an ancient family who can hold up their heads with any prince in Europe. He was educated in Paris, and at an early age displayed a rare talent for generalship; the soldier was

born in him, and at the very first opportunity the genius showed itself. He calls himself plainly Captain Scarlet, and at the time he adopted the simple title there were many weighty reasons why he should conceal his real name. There is such a thing, ladies, as young men being hot-headed and quick to avenge certain affronts. I will not say that my brave friend has ever done aught for which the world at large would blame him, if the truth were known, but this I will say, at the time when I first encountered him in the village of Dulcigno, if a certain person, high in power, had known that he was there, his life would not have been worth an hour's purchase; but in the Montenegrin army, as the Scarlet Captain, his foes would not be apt to recognize him. This, ladies, is the absolute truth. My friend is not rich, although the heir to a large estate, but other claimants have appeared and he is in danger of losing everything, and if they succeed he most certainly will; and therefore now he can say with truth that his sword is his only dependence." So Lauderdale delivered.

Small information in this simple story, and, although Catherine felt sure that in some skillful manner she was being juggled with, yet she was not able to openly detect the cheat.

The party arrived safely at the old castle just above the town of Scutari on the Montenegrin side of the lake, and found that the lady to whom Catherine had referred, alarmed at the near approach of the war, had retired to the capital of Roumania; but the servants still occupied the castle and gladly received the countess, and eagerly promised to do all within their power to make the two ladies comfortable.

"Tell your friend, this unknown gentleman, that I would like an interview with him when he can spare the time from his pressing duties to ride to the side of Lake Scutari," Catherine had said to the American at parting, and Lauderdale promised to deliver the message.

The countess watched the horseman ride off and then sought the solitude of her own apartment, which was an old-fashioned gothic chamber in the right wing of the building looking out upon the garden.

Like all the old country mansions common to Montenegro the castle was a castle in reality as well as in name, and had been built as much for defense as for shelter.

The servants who had been left in charge of the estate, some twenty in number, formed no mean garrison, and could easily hold the mansion against a considerable force provided the assailants were without artillery.

Three days the countess remained in suspense, listening eagerly to the scraps of news brought by the attendants from the neighboring towns.

A truce of one month had been declared between the Porte and the stubborn mountaineers of Montenegro. Really a month's breathing time to allow both parties to better prepare for the strife.

That the Turkish sultan would desist from his purpose of punishing the rebellious mountaineers and submit quietly to the indignity of having his tax-gatherers driven in hot haste over the frontier was not to be supposed for a moment, and that the Montenegrans, flushed with their crowning victories over three of the best of the Ottoman generals, would yield one single inch, supported, too, by all the secret encouragement that Russia could give, was quite improbable.

And the countess, puzzling her head vainly over the riddle as to who and what the man was whom she had married at such short acquaintance, and in so singular a manner, wondered, now that the truce had been declared, why the Scarlet Captain did not come.

Her suspense was ended at last, for one evening, just after nightfall, the unknown dismounted at the gate of the castle, and sent word to the countess that he had come as she had requested.

At once Catherine gave orders that he should be conducted to her presence.

Face to face then again stood the husband and wife, who had been joined under such strange circumstances.

"Be seated sir," said the countess graciously.

The soldier obeyed.

Catherine, sinking into an arm-chair, surveyed with a woman's curious eyes the face of the man who was so great a mystery to her.

The captain looked just about the same as on the night when the countess had made his acquaintance in so unceremonious a manner, although now, instead of the wild, picturesque costume of the Montenegrin mountaineer, he wore an undress uniform patterned after that in vogue in the French service.

"Sir, I have sent for you, because I wish to know who you are?" Catherine began, in the most abrupt manner.

The gentleman did not seem to be in the least astonished, but appeared to regard the question as quite correct.

"Who I am," he said, slowly and reflectively.

"Well, in the first place I am a man; in the second place I am your husband, and in the third place I am called the Scarlet Captain, and

hold a commission in the Montenegrine service."

"All this I know!" the countess exclaimed, impatiently, "and you have not answered my question. You are my husband but in name, for you swore on the honor of a gentleman that you would never claim the rights of a husband; you are called Scarlet, doubtless, but that is not your only name."

"Pardon me, if I remind you that this interview is not of my seeking," the Scarlet Captain said, gravely, but gently. "I came as you requested, although I anticipated that you would question me, and I knew that I should not be allowed to gratify your curiosity."

"Why did you come?"

"Why did I come!" cried the captain, quickly, his eyes sparkling and his whole manner changing; "I came because I am a man and you are a beautiful woman—the fairest that ever yet came beneath my gaze!"

The dark eyes of the countess sought the ground, and her cheeks crimsoned as she listened to the words of praise.

"I came," the captain continued, earnestly, "because I was eager to look once again upon the face of the only woman in this world who had ever touched my heart of stone. I loved you, Catherine, the moment I saw you. For the sake of that love I accepted the hard condition you imposed upon me in the old tower of Dulcigno; I wedded you, swearing upon my honor never to claim the rights of a husband; only a poor consolation was left to me; the marriage rites, although they did not give you to me, yet prevented you from becoming another's; if not mine, then you were no one's in this world. I risked my life for that empty satisfaction, and, by a miracle alone, I escaped the Turkish sabers and the perils of the leap into the sea. And then, a second time, impelled by the love that was in my heart, I rescued you from the power of the cruel renegade. I dared all for your sake, but now mine is the torture of the fabled god, bound to the rock with the water gurgling past his lips, tormented with an ever-burning thirst, and yet denied the refreshing draught. I can look upon your beautiful face; see how pure, how good, how noble you are, a very gem among women; remember that at the sacred altar of heaven you have sworn to love, honor and obey me, and yet know that the vow was but the empty breath of a hollow mockery; know that you are as far from me as the sun is from the earth; know that, situated as I am, the Scarlet Captain can never hope to win the woman who yet is truly his by the holiest tie the world doth know!"

There were traces of moisture in Catherine's brilliant eyes as she raised her head.

"Why do you play upon my feelings?" she exclaimed. "I know your secret; you are Nicholas, Prince of Montenegro!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PRINCE OF MONTENEGRO.

A SMILE came over the manly face of the soldier as he listened to the direct declaration so strongly and abruptly made by the countess.

Eagerly Catherine watched the play of his features. She believed that in his face her keen eyes could detect whether her suspicion was true or false; but the face neither confirmed nor denied.

"And if I am Nicholas, Prince of Montenegro, what then?" he asked.

"Can you not guess?" she replied, slowly and tremulously, and again her eyes sought the floor.

A sad expression came over the face of the soldier; it was plain that he was grieved and disappointed.

"I think I understand," he said, with calm and measured accent. "If I am Nicholas, Prince of Montenegro, the oath I took just before I wedded you is to be regarded as null and void; that is, you surrender to the Prince what you deny to the soldier."

The words touched Catherine to the quick. It was the truth; she could not deny it, and—could she excuse it?

"You judge me harshly," she murmured. "Place yourself in my situation. I am a daughter of one of the oldest families in all Europe; what would the world say if Catherine, Countess of Scutari, forgot her high descent and wedded a poor and nameless soldier?"

"Poor, countess, yes; but not nameless, thank Heaven, since the hour when in the mountain pass I entrapped skillful Ismail Bey, and captured his entire column of two thousand men!" the captain cried, with swelling voice and honest pride. "No nameless soldier, Catherine, the Montenegrine leader who at a single stroke took all the Turkish artillery in the Duga Pass, and routed stout Mukhtar Pasha with fire from his own guns; no unknown adventurer, lady, the man who wrested the strong tower of Dulcigno from the Ottomites, and by the act banished the Crescent banner from the mountain soil. No, countess, not unknown now, for my deeds are written on the immortal pages of history, and in after years, when a new generation read the story of this war, they will be able to say with truth

that the mountaineers of Montenegro, although accepting odds that rank as ten to one, rolled back the tide of Turkish invasion as stoutly as did old Charles Martel—Charles the Hammer—on the plains of Tours in the days of yore!"

"But your name and station!" cried Catherine, excited beyond measure; "I will not believe you when you say that you are poor and unknown. Who are you?"

"Three days ago I was nothing, truly, but to-night I am the commander-in-chief of the Montenegrine army, the victorious general who has beaten back the fierce Turkish invasion and compelled the mighty Porte to sue for a truce in order that he may have time to patch up the quarrel as best he may, before the Russian bear lets slip the dogs of war upon him."

"Aha! you are Prince Nicholas, for he is the commander-in-chief of the Montenegrine army!" cried Catherine, rising in her excitement.

"And if I were the Montenegrine prince you would yield to me the priceless treasure of the love which to the simple captain you deny?"

A burning blush covered the beautiful features of the girl, and hiding her face in her hands, she turned away.

The reproach cut her to the heart, and yet she could not deny that it was true.

"Catherine, you never will be mine, then," the soldier continued, sadly. "Were I ten times the Montenegrine prince—were I the proud lord of one-half the world, a king over kings, I would despise the love of any woman whose pride so far outweighed her passion that she would yield her heart's dearest treasure and give to the empty title what she refused to the deserving man!"

Softly and sadly he had begun, but earnest and proud was his tone ere he finished.

"Oh, do not judge me so harshly!" she exclaimed, with outstretched hands, tears gleaming like pearls in her brilliant eyes.

"If I am the Prince of Montenegro you will release me from my oath, but if I am only the adventuring soldier I must still be bound!" he exclaimed sternly. "You will not believe me when I declare that the proudest title that I now bear is that of the victorious general who surprised Ismail Bey and Osman Pasha in the mountains, and routed Mukhtar Pasha in the Duga Pass and thereby freed Montenegro from the tread of the invading Turk! You will not believe, but you must. Prince Nicholas is below, a noble youth, and one who has fought right well for his people, when it is considered that he is but a boy fresh from his school in Paris. You shall see him within the next few minutes, and when you see the true prince, you will quickly perceive the difference between Nicholas of Montenegro and such a man as I am!" And then the soldier hastened from the apartment, leaving the countess overwhelmed with emotion.

Throwing herself into a chair she gave free vent to her tears.

"His words were bitter but I deserve them all," she murmured between her sobs. "Oh, foolish pride to come between me and such a man!"

It was some time before Catherine's emotion spent itself and she became calm again, and hardly had she succeeded in gaining her composure when one of the servants entered the apartment bringing word that a Montenegrine gentleman desired speech with the countess.

"What sort of a gentleman is he, Michael?" she asked, curious, womanlike, although she felt sure it was the Montenegrine prince.

"Oh, he's a mere lad, my lady," the old servant answered, "but he has a body-guard with him and from the respect they pay him it is evident that he is a person of rank."

"Show him in," she said.

The servant withdrew.

Catherine pressed her hand upon her heated brow. She was terribly agitated.

"The prince is not old; he was finishing his education in Paris; can it be possible that the Scarlet Captain is nothing more than he says? and I love him, too—love him, even were he a Russian serf or one of the wild Cossacks of the Don! He is my lord and master and when I am in his presence I feel it."

The entrance of a slender youth of seventeen or eighteen years of age into the apartment interrupted the meditations of the countess.

He was a pleasant-faced lad, attired like the Montenegrine general in a French undress uniform, and as he came gracefully forward, walking with the conscious air of one born to pomp and power, he extended his hand to the countess to kiss.

Upon the slender forefinger of the boy gleamed the old diamond signet-ring of the princely house of Montenegro, a jewel worth a king's ransom.

"This is the Countess of Scutari, I believe?" he said.

The countess bowed.

"We are kindred, countess; I am the Prince of Montenegro."

And Catherine did not doubt that the royal boy spoke the truth.

"And the Scarlet Captain, sire, who is he?" she asked, frankly.

"Well, countess," he replied, laughing, "don't mention it, but about this time he is more Prince of Montenegro than I am. At least I don't know what I would do without him."

"But you know who he really is—his rank and title?"

"The best he can boast of to my knowledge is commander-in-chief of the army of Montenegro; but there, countess, I won't tease you. I do know the captain's secret, but it is not mine to reveal; state reasons forbid it. After this week's bold work we should have all the neighboring kingdoms aroused if it were known who he really is. He's a strange fellow, too," the young prince continued, musingly. "He can have any title that he chooses—count, baron, marquis, duke—all are within his grasp, but he refuses and says he prefers to remain a simple soldier. If I had my way, after that magnificent victory the other day, he should be the Duke of Duga at once."

The heart of the haughty countess was touched; she understood the motives that actuated the soldier. He despised empty titles for he would be loved for himself alone.

"He has his wish," she murmured, in her heart of hearts, "for I love him—I love him!"

Quite a pleasant half-hour the young prince spent with the countess and then he withdrew to ride back to Dulcigno where he had his quarters.

And now that Catherine was satisfied that the Scarlet Captain was not Nicholas of Montenegro the question was *who was he?*

CHAPTER XXX.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

SCUTARI is something of a town; the population is estimated to be above 40,000, and its natural advantages for defense, improved as they have been by skillful engineers, make it one of the strongest places in Albania.

The town is well inclosed by strong walls, and still further defended by two castles placed on eminences that command the city.

The works were strongly garrisoned, but since the declaration of the truce the martial vigilance had somewhat slackened.

Just within the walls, by what was commonly termed the Dulcigno gate, so named because the highway to the Adriatic led through it, was a small inn, displaying at its sign the well-known image, which we have before described to our readers, of a black bear's head.

The inn was a quiet one and not much frequented, depending as it did entirely upon travelers coming from the sea.

Just as the shades of night were falling thick and heavy a single horseman rode through the Dulcigno gate, coming from the open country. He was an ordinary traveler apparently, for he was dressed after the fashion common to traveling merchants, well armed, as everybody had to be in such troublous times who dared to venture from the protection of the walled cities.

The little squad of Turkish soldiers who guarded the gate looked with true Oriental indifference upon the traveler, but neither stopped nor questioned him.

Since the truce had been promulgated the rigid rules of war had been relaxed, and peaceable travelers were no longer harassed by a string of questions regarding their names, business, why they journeyed and whither, but were suffered to pass unquestioned. Of course the approach of a large body of men would have excited suspicion, and the massive gates would have been closed in a trice.

The horseman bowed graciously to the soldiers as he passed by them, and then fell to examining the town. It was plain that he was a stranger to Scutari's ancient city.

"The first inn, he said, from the Dulcigno gate; no sign but the bush at the door and the bottles in the window," he muttered, his keen blue eyes carefully examining the surroundings.

And then, all of a sudden, his eyes fell upon the ancient sign of the black bear's head.

The man drew rein instantly and gazed at the ill-painted sign-board a moment, open-mouthed.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed, "if that is not an exact imitation of old Dame Koola's sign, then am I a Dutchman!"

And in truth the likeness was remarkable.

The stranger looked carefully around him; there was no other inn at hand; as far as the eye could reach it was the only place of entertainment for man and beast.

"He said that there was no sign, but if that is the place there is one. There is the bush at the door and the bottles in the window. Perhaps the sign has been put up since he was here. At any rate there is no other inn near and this must be the one."

The traveler rode directly to the door; a loutish-looking boy appeared, and in answer to the inquiry informed the seeker after knowledge that the sign was a new one, and had been affixed to the inn that very morning.

"It is the place, then," the horseman intoned; and dismounting from his steed, he gave

the beast in charge of the boy and entered the inn.

Rapping loudly upon one of the tables he called for the host to appear. Judge of the rider's astonishment when old Dame Koola made her appearance.

The surprise was mutual, for the dame was as much astonished as the horseman.

"Skipton Pasha as I'm a sinner!" the old woman exclaimed.

The horseman was the English Bashi Bazouk.

Skipton was gifted naturally with a large amount of that assurance which is commonly termed "brass," and therefore he quickly recovered from his surprise.

"Well, dame, you are the last person that I expected to see here!" he exclaimed.

"It is all the fault of your thieving Bashi Bazouks that I am here," the old woman answered, tartly. "I had a fine inn down yonder by the sea, and was making money by the fistfuls, when your folks got so soundly thrashed in the Duga Pass by the Montenegrans, and when your rascals retreated, as great a hurry as they were in, some of them found time to plunder my inn and set it on fire. I was absent at the time, or else some of the varlets would have paid dear for their fun. When I returned all that was left of my property was the sign which hangs out yonder!"

"By Jove! I knew that bear's head was an old acquaintance!"

"And so, as my inn down yonder was destroyed, I came here, knowing that this place was for sale, and started afresh."

"And your charming daughter?"

"Ah, you rogue! Will you never let the girl alone?"

"She is here with you?"

"Yes, but away on a visit now, but she will be home to-morrow."

And now the soldier approached the delicate subject which had been uppermost in his mind ever since he had ascertained that the old dame was the owner of the inn.

"In regard to that little amount, dame, wherein I stand your debtor—"

"Oh, don't mention it!" the old woman protested, bluntly. "I had the worth of my money in the thrashing which my servants gave you. If you're satisfied, I am, and we'll call the account square."

And now Skipton understood for the first time that the old woman had not discovered the trick which he had so skillfully played when he had induced the Irish-Turk, Oflan Agan, to change hats and cloaks with him, and, as his representative, blunder into the thrashing which the enraged innkeeper had threatened to bestow upon him.

It was an easy way to quit the debt—getting another man to take the thrashing—and Skipton mentally wished that he could induce all his creditors to take satisfaction in the same way.

"Oh, I bear no malice; it is not in my nature!" the Bashi Bazouk replied. "We'll e'en let the matter pass and say no more about it."

"So be it, and if you want wine you're welcome to it—"

"Ah, thanks!"

"Provided that you pay on the nail," the dame added.

Skipton made a grimace, but thinking that he was getting off easy and that he had had luck enough for one day, he took a silver-piece from his pocket and tossed it on the table.

"There's the money; now a bottle of wine and a room where I can receive a few friends in private. They will come after nightfall and ask for Captain Dash—that's your humble servant—and you will conduct them instantly to me."

The old woman surveyed the soldier suspiciously for a moment.

"See here!" she exclaimed; "this isn't going to lead to any trouble, is it? I've just lost one inn, and I can't afford to have another one burnt down."

"Oh, no; make your mind easy on that score."

"All right; come this way."

The old woman led the way to a small apartment in the rear of the larger room, containing merely an old table and four chairs.

"Will this do?"

"Excellently; we will not be apt to be disturbed!"

"Oh, no; I'm not much troubled with custom yet, worse luck!" the dame had to declare.

"Ah, when the fame of your good wine gets noised around Scutari, the case will be different."

"I hope so; are there chairs enough to accommodate your friends?"

"Four," remarked the soldier, counting; "yes, that is the exact number. There will be three besides myself."

"Captain Dash you said?" the dame observed, her hand on the door-latch.

"Yes; you will not forget?"

"Oh, no; but no fighting, mind!"

"Tranquillize your mind; there will be no danger of a disturbance."

Reassured by this information, the dame with-

drew, but returned in a few moments with the wine and glasses, which she placed upon the table before Skipton, where she had previously placed the candle which she had carried in her hand.

It was now quite dark, and after the old woman withdrew, the Englishman carefully closed the shutter which guarded the single window to the room.

"There may be some curious persons prowling around without, and, from what the chief said, I judge that we do not visit Scutari merely for the sake of the ride," he mused, as he made the fastenings of the shutter secure.

Then he amused himself by sampling the wine, and he had managed to about drain the bottle, when the door opened and a tall, dark man, well wrapped in a capote, so as to completely disguise his identity, walked into the room.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A DARK SCHEME.

Skipton rose at once to receive his visitor, and from his manner a close observer would have detected that the stranger was no common man.

The new-comer cast a rapid glance around the room.

Skipton understood the meaning of the look.

"No danger, your excellency, of either being seen or heard. The inn has no guests, and no tenants excepting the old woman who keeps it, and the stable-boy."

The Englishman had possessed himself of this information by a series of skillfully-put questions addressed to the boy-hostler.

"It is well," the stranger replied in the low, deep voice peculiar to him, and which few of the characters in our story would not have recognized on the instant.

Then the stranger seated himself by the table, removed the hood of the capote from his brow and threw open the folds of the heavy garment.

Ismail Bey was revealed.

As usual, fate had favored the stern renegade at the eleventh hour. He had descended the ladder, affixed to the window of the old tower, in hot haste, had jumped into one of the fishing-boats beneath, and as luck would have it the boat was fitted with a sail. To adjust this to catch the breeze was but the work of a moment; then he put boldly out to sea, knowing that the chase would surely lead the Montenegrans to look up and down the shore and that he must not try to land anywhere in the vicinity of the tower.

The darkness of the night and noise of the storm, then just beginning to lull a little, preparatory to clearing away, all favored the bold attempt, and so once again, "by the skin of his teeth," as it were, the renegade escaped from the men who were so eager for his blood.

"Your men are all right?" Ismail continued.

"Yes, your excellency, agreeably to your orders I selected four of the best men in my command—reliable fellows, brave as lions."

"And trusty?"

"They will be dumb if I say the word; the rack and thumbscrews could not extract a syllable from them."

"Exactly the kind of men I need," the renegade remarked approvingly. "Where are they now?"

"Concealed in a grove just outside the walls of the town. If you remember, your excellency, you particularly cautioned me not to bring them within the gates."

"Yes, I remember. I have good reasons for the precaution. Even so small a squad as four men would be apt to excite remark passing the gate, for these wild devils of Bashi Bazouks cannot disguise themselves and put on the aspect of ordinary travelers; the soldier is sure to show; and we are not now in a time of war, you know; a truce has been declared."

"Yes, your excellency." Skipton did not exactly comprehend the drift of these remarks.

"Besides yourself there are two others to come."

"So your excellency advised me."

"And each of the two, like myself, brings four picked men with him. Were these men introduced into the town and remark occasioned, the commander of the post here, who is not noted for his caution, but rather for the want of it, would be sure to try to pry into the matter. Of course by revealing myself, and using the weight of my power, I could silence him, but then the chances are that my object would be defeated by adopting such a course. As I said before, we are in the midst of a truce; all warfare is suspended, and yet, in spite of the truce, with twelve picked men and three officers I am about to deal the enemy a blow that will inflict more damage upon the Montenegrane cause than a bad defeat after a pitched battle in the field."

Skipton listened in silence; the English love of fair-play springing so strong within the breast of nearly every son of the tight little island, whose morning drum-beat chases the sun in its course around the whole world, still

held a place within the bosom of the Bashi Bazouk.

To take advantage of a truce to deal an enemy an ugly blow—well, it might answer for the Turk, but it was a cowardly act.

But the interest of the adventure—the soldier of fortune serving where he could get the highest price for his precious blood—stifled the feelings of the man; and so Skipton kept his thoughts to himself and said nothing.

"We must work in silence and in secret," the renegade continued. "No living man must know from whom the blow comes, the members of our force alone excepted!"

"And you will strike the blow to-night, your excellency?"

"Within an hour if all goes well."

The conversation at this point was interrupted by the entrance of a third party into the room.

Like the other two the new-comer wore the huge capote, so common to the country, and so excellent a disguise when a man wished to conceal his identity, for the garment completely hid both face and form, and yet from its constant use would excite no curious remark.

"Tare an' ounds! ye said the inn had no sign!" the man exclaimed, and the voice as well as the manner of the speech told that the speaker was the Irish-Turk, Oflan Agan.

"Nor had it when I was here the other day; the sign has been put up since," the renegade exclaimed.

"Bedad! I come near goin' by, do ye mind? It's not worth talkin' about, but the sign of this inn excites unpleasant remembrances in me mind," Oflan Agan remarked, gravely.

It was as much as Skipton could do to refrain from laughing in the face of the other, for he understood that the shoulders of the Irishman, broad as they were, had not yet recovered from the effects of the thrashing he had received from old Mother Koola's servants, when the jolly Bashi Bazouk had been mistaken for his more slender English brother.

The renegade, his mind intent upon the scheme which his active brain had formed, paid but little attention to the words of the Irishman.

"Where are your men?" he asked.

"Jist beyant the town snuggled down in a clump of timber," Oflan answered. "I had hard wourk to find a place to hide them, for the best grove for the purpose near the wall was occupied by four of the blackest-lookin' rascals that I ever set me two eyes on. You may take your oath, yer excellency, that them spalpeens are afther no good."

Skipton burst into a loud laugh.

"Phat's the matter wid yees?" demanded the Irishman, astonished at the burst of merriment.

"I'll lay ten to one that the rascals you so graphically describe are my men."

"Bedad, I'll take me oath they were!" replied the Bashi Bazouk, immediately, a sudden light breaking in upon him. "Be the gods of war! it's lucky I restrained my scamps; they were for comin' to swords' points with them the moment they discovered them."

"It is fortunate that you restrained your fellows, for an open brawl even between our own men would be sure to ruin our enterprise," the renegade observed. Then he consulted his watch. "Eight o'clock; it is time Hassan was here."

The two Bashi Bazouks exchanged glances. If report spoke true, Hassan El Moola was the right-hand man of the stern governor of Albania, and to please his chief would stop at no bloody deed.

Again the door opened and another capoted man walked into the room.

Knowing whom to expect, the three within the apartment had little difficulty in recognizing Hassan El Moola, the former commander of the old town of Dulcigno.

Throwing open the coarse outer garment, the face and figure of the Turk stood revealed.

Like the rest, El Moola was armed to the teeth; a heavy saber belted to his waist, a glittering knife in his girdle and two revolvers slung by his side.

"You have succeeded, Hassan!" the renegade cried, eagerly.

"To the letter," the Turk replied, triumphantly.

"Aha! you've tracked the prey to his lair!"

"Yes, your excellency."

"And where do they find a covert?"

"In an old castle a few miles from the Dulcigno gate on the road leading up the Montenegrane side of the lake. There are only four in the party."

"Good!" cried the renegade, a ferocious expression plainly visible in his voice, "he cannot escape us. All four must die, for in this matter we must remember the old adage, 'dead men tell no tales.' Montenegro shall wake tomorrow and miss her new-found hero, this Scarlet Captain!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

SOMETHING LIKE ASSASSINATION.

The Bashi Bazouk captains looked at each other. This was the first intimation they had

received as to who the man was against whom they were to operate.

Even Hassan had no suspicion. He had been instructed by Ismail Bey to pick four of his trustiest men and lie in wait on a certain road, and when a small party of Montenegrans passed him, men who looked like soldiers, but who dressed like merchants, he was to follow them cautiously until he tracked them to their journey's end, then he must post his men to watch the spot and come himself in hot-haste to the little inn in the town of Scutari.

As Hassan had said, he had carried out his instructions to the letter.

Lying well concealed by the side of the road, just as the gloom of the night came on, his patience was rewarded by the sight of four travelers, Montenegrans evidently, and men of a martial habit, although wearing the garb of peace; they were all well armed, but that was nothing out of the way in these stirring times, when even the peasant, as he took his way to plow in the field, carried his arms with him. Skillfully, and with great caution, Hassan and his men had tracked the horsemen until they saw the Montenegrans safely housed in the old castle by the borders of the lake; then the Turk, posting his men so as to command the house, had ridden at topmost speed to the appointed meeting-place.

Ismail Bey had been well served: it was no lucky accident that had put him upon the track of the Countess of Scutari; no, it was his own crafty wit.

Hardly had he reached the Turkish lines in safety, after his narrow escape from the Montenegrans in the old tower, when he summoned the chief of the spies.

This fellow, an Albanian-Montenegrin-Turk-Austrian-Russian, native of a dozen lands, apparently, and speaking each tongue as fluently as though he had never known another, was one man picked out of ten thousand to serve the purpose of the renegade.

"Set out at once!" Ismail had directed; "the Countess of Scutari is in the old tower of Dulcigno; when she leaves the tower, hang you upon her track, and sleep not until you discover where she takes up her quarters, and make report to me."

The spy did as he was bidden, and so cunningly did he disguise his person and his mission, that as a Montenegrin soldier he had ridden in the troop commanded by Lauderdale, the American, which had escorted the countess to the castle by the side of Lake Scutari.

And so near had this accomplished rascal contrived to get to the side of the fair girl, that he had overheard her invitation addressed to the Scarlet Captain and given to Lauderdale to bear.

And a few hours afterward the renegade was in possession of the information, and the spy was richer by a hundred gold pieces. Ismail paid like a prince, and therefore was he well served.

The spy returned to watch matters in the Montenegrin camp.

Sooner or later, grim Ismail calculated, the Scarlet Captain would accept the invitation of the countess, and then his turn would come.

When the truce was declared the assurance became doubly certain, for now, apparently, the Montenegrin leader could visit the wife he had wedded so strangely, without danger; and the stern enemy smiled darkly when he reflected that his anger knew no truce—regarded no peace, and that now he would soon have a chance to catch his enemy upon the hip and smite him with all the bitter strength born of sullen hatred.

The spy, shrewd almost beyond the telling, ascertained the day selected by the Scarlet Captain for the visit—the hour nearly—and found means to convey the information at once to his employer.

And this is how it happened that Ismail had his chosen men prepared to assail the foe he hated.

"How about the truce, your excellency?" asked Skipton Pasha, doubtfully. In truth, the fair-minded Englisher had little stomach for such work as this. It savored far too much of assassination and it did not suit him well, although he was but a soldier of fortune, an adventurer, selling his sword and blood to the Turk because he was a liberal paymaster.

"What has a truce to do with private vengeance?" Ismail asked. "This man and his companion will fall by the hand of secret foes; no officer of the Turkish army will be implicated in the matter. If you have picked your men rightly they will know enough to keep their tongues between their teeth, when they are well paid for it."

"Sorra a doubt of my blaggards!" Ofan Again exclaimed.

"Nor of mine," said Hassan.

"Oh, mine can be trusted!" Skipton hastened to remark. "I was only thinking that if the matter should happen to get out, what a row it would make; if one of the party should happen to escape us now!"

"They must not escape!" the renegade declared, significantly. "The grave reveals no secrets; dead men return not to tell the story of

their fate. They will be missed, of course; their bodies discovered, but the country abounds with robbers, and as the remains will be stripped of everything of value, it will not be difficult for the world at large to believe that they had fallen victims to some roving band of outlaws."

Skipton held his peace; much as he disliked the task he saw that there was no escape, and so, like a true philosopher, he resolved to make the best of it.

"And as for the truce," the renegade continued, "the end sanctifies the means; the death of this man is necessary for the success of my plans—necessary, too, for the success of the attempt to subdue Montenegro. This man is no common captain, and his death will be as great a blow to the cause of the insurgents as would be the capture of their cherished Duga Pass. The sultan has already offered a reward of five thousand gold pieces for the head of this fellow, and I will take care that, if we succeeded in our enterprise to-night, the money comes into the right hands. And now to horse at once."

Quietly the little party left the inn and mounted their beasts, and as they rode through the gateway, four peaceable travelers apparently, the sleepy knot of Turkish soldiers, gazing listlessly at them, had little idea that the great Governor of Albania was one of the horsemen.

After passing the gate, the two Bashi Bazouk captains, Agan and Skipton, rode on in advance and collected their men.

The eight soldiers were all disguised in huge capotes like their leaders, and also like them were armed to the teeth.

As the two rode along side by side toward where their men were concealed, a few words of conversation passed between them.

"It's an ugly bit of business," Skipton observed; the Englishman could not bring himself to look with indifference upon the matter.

"Shure! it's a good bit like takin' a whack at a man behind his back," the Irishman replied.

"Fighting I don't mind; but *this* affair is a deuced sight like an assassination."

"Bedad! it is like it, but it's none of our business. He's a foe to the man that pays us, an' either was of us would be glad to knock him in the head in the open field, so what's the differ; an' we're to get well paid, too, d'ye mind?"

Skipton did not reply. He saw that the Irishman was not troubled with any scruples and that the five thousand gold pieces had dazzled his eyes and blunted whatever moral sense he might have possessed.

Skipton was a young man—a better one, too, in every way than the Irish-Turk. He willingly sold the use of his sword and risked the shedding of his blood for hire, but not to coolly and deliberately assassinate a foe who had shown himself to be both generous and able; for after the capture of the Turkish column in the mountain pass, whither it had been decoyed by the false guide, the Montenegrin leader, the moment the tower of Dulcigno was in his hands, had paroled all his prisoners, merely making them take oath not to take up arms again on Montenegrin soil for the space of a year.

And now in cold blood this man must be—ambushed—killed!

No wonder that the Englishman had no taste for the task!

The two captains found their men snugly posted in their respective coverts, and within a few moments all were in the saddle and trotting along in the rear of their leader.

A brisk half-hour's ride and the entire party drew rein about a quarter-of-a-mile from the old castle where the Countess of Scutari had found refuge. A small grove of scrubby oaks afforded shelter to the Turks. Within the grove were Hassan's four men, who had been left to watch the castle. All was well; the Scarlet Captain and his companions were still within the mansion.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE AMBUSHCADE.

Just on the borders of the little grove, was an old peasant's hut, so weather-beaten that it barely held together.

It had been deserted long ago, the owner having fled to the mountains to escape the Turkish officers who were rudely impressing men to reinforce the Ottoman army.

Ismail's attention was attracted to the hut.

"The very thing for our purpose," he said to Hassan; "I wish to take the Montenegrin leader alive, if it be possible. I have a shrewd suspicion that he is a Russian officer. After he is taken—if we succeed in our design—I will examine him, and it is possible that I may be able to procure some important information from him."

El Moola nodded his approval; the idea seemed good to him.

"And then, when the deed is done, by leaving the body in the hut and setting fire to the structure, all trace of our work will be destroyed."

"Your excellency plans well."

The conversation at this point was interrupted by the opening of the castle gates and the appearance of four horsemen.

The night was dark and the moon, although up and full, shone but dimly. The renegade saw that the course taken by the Montenegrans would not bring them nearer than about three hundred feet of the grove where he and his men were ambushed.

It was some distance for an effective shot under such auspices, and Ismail rather doubted the marksmanship of the Bashi Bazouks.

And so, to "make assurance doubly sure," he directed the men to reserve their fire until he gave the word, and to aim at the horses. Skipton and his four men were ordered to mount and be prepared to intercept the Montenegrans in case they escaped unharmed from the fire of the rest.

The four horsemen galloped briskly on, apparently without the slightest suspicion of danger, and when the keen eyes of the renegade saw that they were as near to the grove as they were likely to come, he gave the word:

"Steady, men; fire!"

The reports of the muskets rung out shrilly on the still night air, and with the sound Skipton dashed forward with his mounted men.

At first sight the discharge seemed to have passed harmlessly by the assailed men, for they were riding away at topmost speed, apparently untouched by the bullets; but, all of a sudden, two of the horses were down, one carrying the rider with it, the other flinging him over his shoulder, so sudden the stoppage.

All the Turks, with wild yells, were charging forward from their place of ambush, and the two mounted Montenegrans, who, finding their comrades were disabled, had at first been inclined to stop and attempt to succor them, upon perceiving the number of the attacking party, reconsidered their determination, put spurs to their horses and fled as fast as they were able.

Lauderdale and the stripling, whom the reader knows as the Prince of Montenegro, were the lucky ones who had escaped unharmed from the murderous discharge. The Scarlet Captain and his orderly were down.

The soldier had received a ball in his chest, and was dying when Skipton reached his side.

Recognizing that one of the fallen men was the noted Montenegrin leader, the Englishman had suspended pursuit.

In fact, owing to the start that the fugitives had gained, pursuit would have been but a waste of time, for the Montenegrans were well mounted and their horses seemed gifted with the speed of the wind.

The dying man glared at Skipton as the Bashi Bazouk bent over him, and a single sentence came from his lips.

The Englishman stared in astonishment as he listened to the words, and he bent forward, eagerly, to question the speaker, but it was too late; death had set its everlasting seal upon the lips of the soldier; the stout Montenegrin warrior would speak no more in this world.

With a mind amazed at the revelation which had been so suddenly and unexpectedly made, Skipton walked to where the Scarlet Captain was lying prostrate on the earth, stunned for the moment by the shock of his fall.

"It can't be, and yet—but I'll keep my own counsel at present," the Englishman muttered.

He stooped over and examined the fallen man, saw that he was uninjured except by the shock of the fall, and that in a short time he would be all right again.

In a few seconds Ismail Bey reached the spot.

There was a gleam of triumph in the dark eyes of the renegade as he looked upon the face of the senseless man, now utterly helpless in his power.

"Bind him securely!" he cried, "then take him up, some of you, and carry him to the old hut."

The commands were carried out at once, and when the prisoner was safely deposited in the hut, through the main window of which came sufficient of the moon's light to dimly make visible the interior, Ismail gave fresh commands.

"Draw off your men to a safe distance," he said. "The man is beginning to recover and I want five minutes' conversation with him, and as we shall speak of state matters I do not wish listeners."

The order was obeyed at once.

A hundred feet from the door of the hut the Turks gathered, just within the shelter of the grove, and waited for their leader's pleasure.

Within the hut, in the center of the ruins, with folded arms, standing in the moonlight like some dark specter from the other world, the renegade stood and gazed in triumph upon the face of the man whom he intended to make his victim.

"I will soothe him with soft words of pardon and of safety, wring his secrets from him and then kill him with as little mercy as though he were a mad-dog snapping at my heels," the wily trickster murmured, gazing the while at the handsome face of the man he hated so bitterly, and who now seemed utterly deserted by his good fortune. A miracle alone, seemingly,

could rescue the Scarlet Captain from the vengeance of the renegade.

An ugly fall the captive had got, but the effects were speedily passing away now, and soon he opened his eyes and looked around him. The ruined walls, his bound and helpless condition, the triumphant face of Ismail Bey, fully explained the situation.

"Well, sir, we meet again and under different circumstances than when we held a conference in the mountain pass," the Turk observed, beginning the conversation.

"You have broken the truce," the Montenegrin leader replied, indignantly. "Is there no honor left in the Moslem breast—no fear of what the world will say to this act of base treachery?"

"You are the victim of a private vengeance," the renegade replied, coldly. "I am not now acting as an officer of the sultan but as a private individual. You have crossed my path, interfered with my schemes and must pay the penalty of your rashness. Few men have dared to brave my power and lived to tell of it. For satisfaction due to private wrong I hold you now a helpless prisoner, and nothing in this world can save you from my vengeance—one thing alone excepted."

"And what is that?"

"At the head of the Montenegrins you have baffled my invasion of Montenegro and brought disaster upon my arms. I am willing to forego my vengeance and release you on one condition."

"You are merciful," and there was a sneer in the voice of the Scarlet Captain as he spoke.

"Vengeance to me is sweet—sweeter perhaps than to most men, but there is something sweet still and that is reputation. It is my ambition to conquer Montenegro and be able to return to the sultan and say, 'See what I have done; the stubborn mountaineers who have for aye renounced your claims now kneel in submission!'"

"And what would you have me do?"

"Reveal to me the hidden springs which excited the mountaineers to arms; is not Russia at the bottom of all the trouble? Does she not furnish arms, money and men to the insurgents? Are you not a Russian officer—one of high rank, too?"

"And if I speak shall I live?"

"Yes."

"And refusing, die?"

"Most certainly!"

"Send in your executioner then, for I laugh at your promises and despise your threats!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A PARLEY.

With an angry brow the renegade gazed upon the bold speaker; the defiance aroused all his rage. Even captivity, with the prospect of certain death at any moment, seemed to have no terrors for the soul of the bold mountaineer leader.

Russian, Montenegrin, or whatever countryman he was, he was a bold, brave fellow, a credit to his native land.

The renegade was as fierce in his rage as the mother-tiger robbed of her young; and long lease of power had made him utterly regardless of all consequences that might ensue from his violent acts; and yet, at times, dark Ismail held his passions in check and could parley with the victims he intended to strike with a smooth voice and a gentle accent.

And so, in this case, a certain point in view, which he desired to reach, caused him to curb his anger, and with soft words he endeavored to win the Montenegrin leader to his purpose.

"Come, come!" he said. "Enough of angry words; let us talk sense."

The captive surveyed the wily renegade with his clear, searching eyes; it was plain from the look upon his face that he placed no reliance in the fair words and mistrusted the purpose of the renegade.

"Life is life and death is bitter," the Turkish general continued. "You are young, a great career before you; if any augury can be drawn from the rare knowledge of military science displayed by you in beating back the sultan's forces from Montenegro. Old and renowned generals suffered defeat at your hands, that is if you planned the movements which resulted so disastrously to our forces."

"The plans were mine," the prisoner admitted.

"It was Napoleon at Toulon over again," the renegade remarked; "who knows but that a career as great lies before you, and yet, with all this brilliant prospect you cast it away for the sake of a mere whim. Your life is in my hands; I can either strike or withhold the blow at my own sweet will. No one can question me regarding the act, for your fate will be a mystery to all the world. All that will ever be known of your fate will be that you were waylaid by night. The country is full of roving bands intent on plunder. Your death will be laid to their door. My measures have been well taken; the soldiers without are all picked men, selected expressly for this service; the officers alone know who you are, and their lips will be sealed at my command. My plans not only meditate the taking of your life but

your utter disappearance from the world; your body will never be found, for after the executioner performs his task, I will cause this old hut to be fired and so burn your remains to ashes."

The captive had listened with a calm face to all the details of this frightful scheme, and, perceiving how anxious the Turk was to gain the information he desired, the idea came into his mind to gain time by bargaining with his captor. He was ignorant in regard to the fate of his companions, but as they were not with him and he had not heard any thing of them, he came to the not unnatural conclusion that they had escaped. Of the American Lauderdale's faith and friendship he had no doubt, and the young Montenegrin prince, too, he knew would move heaven and earth to save the man whom he looked upon as the savior of the mountain land.

If he could only gain time sufficient to enable Lauderdale and the prince to reach the Montenegrin camp and return, then the tables would be reversed and the Turks, caught in their own trap, would suffer. Twice already he had held the renegade within his power, but that wily personage, slippery as an eel, had contrived to escape; a third time he might not be so fortunate.

Hope springs eternal in the human breast, and the Montenegrin leader, bound and helpless, with death so near, the fatal bolt ready to be launched at the will of the renegade, was far from despairing.

"The information you wish?" he asked.

"First as to yourself," Ismail replied, catching eagerly at the idea that the prisoner was yielding, "your name and rank in the Russian service, and at whose instigation or orders you take command of the Montenegrin army?"

"You will not believe me, then, if I tell you that I am native to the soil, a Montenegrin born and bred?"

"That may be, and still you may hold a commission in the Russian service and wear a Russian title," the renegade replied. "I am John Belina, a mountaineer born and bred, yet I am Governor of Albania, hold the commission of general in the Turkish service, and am known as Ismail Bey."

"What other information do you desire?"

"The number of men in the Montenegrin army, how many of them are Russian officers or soldiers; the total of the troops who can be depended upon to flock to the insurgents' standard in the event of a general invasion of Montenegro by our forces; also the number of men that Russia has promised to send to assist Montenegro in case the Turkish arms push the mountaineers to the wall?"

"Give me some time to meditate over this matter," the captain said, thoughtfully.

A dark smile, full of evil meaning, came over the face of the renegade. No child was Ismail Bey to be deceived by the cunning arts of the diplomatist.

"Time! Ah! time is a most valuable factor in some of the different problems which we poor mortals have to solve in this life of care. Time given, a man will surmount seeming impossibilities. You require time to reflect upon the matter! how much?"

"As much as you can give."

"I will be liberal," and again the renegade smiled darkly. "You shall have just five minutes, and then, by Allah! you shall die upon the instant!" the renegade cried, fiercely.

"Five minutes—and is that all? Not in the least dismayed seemed the Montenegrin with a calm face he looked upon death, holding his life no more than a worthless pebble, fit only to be cast away."

"All!"

"Send in your executioner, then, for you may as well take my answer now; since the respite is for such a limited time it is not worth the acceptance."

"Reflect! this is your final decision?"

"A hundred times you might put the question and a hundred times you would receive the same answer."

Ismail was satisfied; his design was baffled; the Montenegrin leader would rather die than betray his country. He was of the stuff that patriot-heroes are made of.

Joy to the land whose children would rather die than sell their native soil.

The renegade turned upon his heel and left the hut without a word, rage swelling in his heart because he had not succeeded in his design; at any cost the Montenegrin must die.

Ismail advanced directly to where his men were grouped under the shadow of the trees. The soldiers were gathered around their steeds, the three officers some twenty paces from them, just on the outskirts of the scrubby timber. With true soldierly precaution pickets had been thrown out to guard against a surprise.

Ismail noticed the vedettes and nodded his head in approval. "A good thought, gentlemen," he observed, as he joined the group. "And now we must dispose of the prisoner, and then turn our attention to the castle. The Countess of Scutari is exposed to much danger tarrying in this solitary spot, and it is my in-

tention to carry her to some secure place within the Turkish lines. But the prisoner—time presses and he waits his fate. Who will strike the blow?"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE EXECUTIONER.

BLUNTLY was the question put, and the Turkish officers looked at each other for a few moments in silence. Each appeared to question his fellow and all shrank from the task.

It was not a very soldier-like proceeding, this putting to death of a bound and helpless man; little wonder, then, that even the not over-scrupulous Bashi Bazouk officers shrank from it.

"It will not do to submit the task to one of our soldiers, for the prisoner will undoubtedly declare that he is the Montenegrin officer, and it might be difficult to keep the matter as secret as it must be kept. We must not let the world at large know that we have so openly and flagrantly violated the truce."

Again the officers looked at each other and hesitated to reply.

"There is a reward of five thousand gold-pieces offered for this fellow, dead or alive, and I will take care that the news of our work to-night be brought to the knowledge of the proper officers so that the money can be secured."

All the officers nodded; this idea met their views exactly, but each one was reluctant to undertake the task, though all were ready enough to receive the money.

"Five thousand gold-pieces," the renegade continued, tempting the Bashi Bazouk officers with the glittering bait, as in the first days in the Garden of Eden, Satan tempted fair Mother Eve. "A good sum, gentlemen; it does not hang on every bush, and it can be got so easily, too; it is but a single blow—one straight sabre-thrust and the work is done."

"It is easy enough," Hassan observed, and he glanced at Oflan Agan as much as to suggest that he had better undertake the task.

"Oh, yis, it's aisy enough," the Irish-Turk returned; "shure! it's as aisy as aisy can be!" And he looked, significantly, at Skipton Pasha, and even nodded toward the hut, plainly intimating that he thought the Englishman ought to at once set about the job.

Skipton was strangely preoccupied and seemed to be struggling with some weighty question within his mind, for he took no notice of the significant glances of his brother officers and replied to their words only with a vacant stare.

"Five thousand gold-pieces—a large sum," the tempter continued; "divided among you three it will give each of you a handsome amount. Five divided by three," he continued, reflectively. "I can suggest a better division than that. Divide the five by three, but in this way; one sum of one thousand, another sum of one thousand, and a third sum of three thousand, the last sum to the man who executes the prisoner. That is fair, is it not?"

"Perfectly fair," Hassan answered; "I for one, am content."

"An' so am I!" the Irish-Turk exclaimed. "Bad luck to the man that would grumble at such an aven division!"

Skipton merely nodded; he was still strangely preoccupied.

The renegade's searching eyes noticed Skipton's grave face, and with that quick perception which was so great a feature in his being, instantly pitched upon the Englishman as the man to do the deed.

"Three thousand pieces to the man who strikes the blow, and as in some measure the deed is a personal service to me, I will take care in the future that the man who accepts the offer shall not be forgotten."

This assurance meant a great deal when it is considered that the speaker was one of the highest officials in the Turkish Empire, and that every Turkish officer placed in an official position is expected to feather his nest well while he is in office.

In no other country under the sun, our own glorious republic even not excepted, does the office-holder fare better or get richer pickings than in poor, debt-ridden Turkey.

"Come, Skipton Pasha, why do you hesitate?" demanded Ismail, appealing directly to the Englishman. "Is your purse so heavy or your wants so few that you can afford to neglect this offer?"

"Shure! Skipton's the very man to do it!" Oflan Agan declared, anxious to shift the burden to the shoulders of his comrade.

"Yes, the very man!" Hassan repeated. Even the bloodthirsty Turk, who rarely hesitated at any act, was not desirous of undertaking the task of murdering the helpless prisoner in cold blood.

"Oh, well, if it must be, I suppose it must," the Englishman observed, but evidently very reluctantly.

"All trace of the deed will be removed immediately," the leader remarked, "for, after the deed is done, we'll set fire to the hut and so destroy the body."

"I'll do it," Skipton said, firmly.

"To it at once then."

"I suppose I may give the poor devil time to say a prayer or two?" the Bashi Bazouk observed, drawing his keen, bright saber from its sheath as he spoke.

"Oh, yes; we must not kill soul and body both," the general responded derisively.

"Give him ten minutes to make his peace and get ready for the other world, eh?"

"Yes, but not longer, for time presses," Ismail replied, "and we have much work to do before the night is over; we may have trouble in gaining entrance into the castle, although I do not think that it is guarded."

"No, it is not, your excellency," Hassan hastened to remark.

"And these two Montenegrans who have fled may succeed in getting assistance and return with intent to punish the men who attacked them."

"They must return to Dulcigno, then, for there are no Montenegrin troops nearer, to my knowledge," Hassan observed.

"It is not so long a ride," Ismail replied, "and therefore we have no time to spare. To your work at once, then, Skipton; give the fellow ten minutes, and no longer; and when you strike, strike home; let there be no doubt that the stroke lets out his life!"

"Oh, trust me!" the Englishman exclaimed, confidently, and then he hurried away, making straight for the hut.

Ismail watched him for a few moments, an evil smile upon his dark features.

"At last my vengeance has material whereon to feed," he muttered. "It was an evil day for this Scarlet Captain when he entered the old tower of Dulcigno and braved my power by wedding Catherine of Scutari. Few men in my lifetime have come between me and my aims and lived to boast of it. Old Michael Scutari wronged me long years ago, but by dying escaped my vengeance; the daughter, though, shall satisfy the debt. This night makes her mine past all redemption."

Neither Ismail nor the two Bashi Bazouk officers took their eyes from the figure of the Englishman striding along toward the hut, his naked saber under his arm, until he entered the building, and then all three drew a long breath as though a weight had been removed from their minds.

"Shure! I don't envy him his task," the Irishman observed in an undertone to the Turk. "The gold was no temptation, at all, at all! Bad 'cess to the dirty money gained in such a way! Sorra a bit of luck would come with it."

Hassan nodded; the words expressed his sentiments exactly. Even he, bloodthirsty butcher as he was, shrank from such a deed.

Never, in all their lives, had ten minutes seemed so long a time to each one of the three.

Not a sound came from the hut; the stillness of the tomb reigned in and around the building.

The saber-stroke, cutting its narrow path to the heart of the victim, would make but a slight sound, but the life of a strong, hearty soldier could hardly be extinguished without some noise.

A hollow groan—a shriek of pain, or a cry of anguish, must surely signalize the parting of soul and body.

"Ten minutes have surely elapsed," the renegade muttered, at last growing impatient. "Why does he hesitate? Has his will faltered at the last moment?"

And then, all of a sudden, as if in answer to the question, there came a puff of smoke from the house, two or three cries of mortal pain, and in a second almost, the whole building was wrapped in flames and through them dashed Skipton Pasha, pale as death, a bloody saber in his hand.

"A fiery tomb, gentlemen, for our foe!" Ismail cried with fierce glee. "No more shall the Scarlet Captain lead the hosts of Montenegro!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE ATTACK ON THE CASTLE.

FOR some ten minutes the flames from the burning hut burnt a hole in the darkness of the night, and then with a crash the roof tumbled in, the walls collapsed, and all was darkness, the heavy smoke rising from the ruins and overhanging them like a funeral pall.

In the meantime Skipton had resumed his former position, and, with a gloomy face, employed himself in removing the blood-stains from the polished blade of his saber.

"Why did you fire the hut?" Ismail inquired, sternly, the moment Skipton joined the party. The renegade did not like his plans to be tampered with, and he had not intended that the hut should be fired until he had had a chance to gaze upon the features of the man he hated so bitterly rigid in the cold grasp of death.

"Did you not order me to?" Skipton exclaimed, in surprise.

"No; you misunderstood me; but it does not matter, so long as you are sure that your blow was fatal."

"I struck as well as I knew how," the Englishman answered, "and even if some spark of life remained, the man must be more than mor-

tal to resist the effects of the fire. Do you not notice how the flames are flaring now? They have evidently reached the body."

And in truth something that the forked flames delighted to feed up, they were evidently consuming, as Skipton called attention to the devouring blast.

The renegade was satisfied; and when darkness came again and settled upon the scene, with a look of satisfaction upon his stern features he turned away.

At last his vengeance was complete.

"You are three thousand gold pieces the richer, Skipton; and in time to come I shall not forget the service."

"I shall trust to your excellency's memory," the Bashi Bazouk replied.

It was but a commonplace remark—a natural one, too, under the circumstances, and yet there was something in it that grated harshly upon the ears of Ismail, but what it was he could not tell. He looked searchingly for a moment into the face of the officer, but Skipton was busy wiping off a spot of blood which had besmeared the handle of his weapon, and which had previously escaped his notice, so he was unaware of the scrutiny to which he was subjected.

Ismail dismissed his suspicion as a whim, unworthy of notice, and summoning his men proceeded straight to the castle.

The inmates, whose attention had been attracted by the flames rising from the burning hut, were on the alert, and at first were disposed to offer resistance to the entrance of the Turks, but a few well-aimed shots speedily put to flight all martial thoughts, and tremblingly the gates were opened.

Once again the dark-browed ruffian held Catherine, of Scutari, a prisoner in his hands.

Some fifteen or twenty minutes had been occupied in forcing an entrance, so the countess had ample time to prepare to receive the evil genius who was making himself the bane of her young existence.

In the great hall of the castle, where in the olden time the armed retainers had been used to assemble to receive the commands of their chief, the officer and his followers found the two ladies.

Skipton Pasha had been left in charge of the gate and horses with his four men, but the rest of the force had followed Ismail.

Catherine had vainly attempted to urge the servants to resist the entrance of the Turks; but the men, frightened at the stories they had heard of the bloody vengeance always taken by the Moslems when their demands were resisted, were far too timid to follow the bold counsel of the countess, and while she, in the great hall, was attempting to inspire these chicken-hearted cravens with some of the courage springing within her own dauntless breast, the men below opened the gate and admitted the Turks.

Plainly to the ears of the two ladies came the sound of the tramping feet and the rattle of the weapons, clanking loudly, as the Turkish soldiers rushed up the stairs.

Within the garments of both of the ladies little keen-edged daggers were secreted. They were prepared for the worst; better death by their own hands than to live the helpless victims of barbarous outrages.

The dark eyes of Ismail gleamed as he gazed once again upon the woman whom he had marked out for his prey. Catherine faced him boldly; there was no drop of craven blood within her veins; all the courage of the stout old race from which she sprung was within her woman's breast.

"Fortune favors me, you see!" the renegade exclaimed. "Again we are face to face—again I step forward as the ruler of your fate."

"Will your persecution never cease?" demanded Catherine, undauntedly.

"Never until you are mine!" the Turkish general replied.

"Distant will be that day."

"No; quite near at hand. This night I have widowed you, but to-morrow I will make amends by wedding you myself."

"And has the Scarlet Captain died again?" Catherine asked, scornfully. "The last time but one when we met in the old tower you swore that he was dead, and yet he was not."

"A mistake then—a false report, but no doubt in regard to the matter this time."

In Catherine's face appeared decided disbelief.

"But come, we are wasting time!" Ismail exclaimed, abruptly. "Are you prepared for a journey?"

"Whither?"

"To some safe retreat within the Turkish lines," he replied. "The heiress of Scutari is far too valuable to be permitted to dwell where she may be assailed at any moment by a roving band of plunderers."

"If there are worse men in the world than you and your followers, Heaven save me from them!" the countess cried, her anger flaming suddenly out when she reflected how utterly helpless she was in the power of this bold, bad man.

"Catherine, why waste time in useless re-

criminations. You are mine past all redemption. The only man to whom you could look for any hope of rescue has been sent by my will on his dark journey to the other world. By wedding this adventurer you thought to defeat my plans; for a time you succeeded, but in the end I have triumphed; you have lost the point you attempted to gain and this unknown soldier bartered away his life for the meager and unsubstantial pleasure of bearing the name of husband to you for a few short hours. Come! give up all hope of resistance; I defy either man or devil to tear you from me now!"

Hardly had this boasting speech escaped his lips, and he had advanced to the side of the helpless girl, when there was a sudden commotion in the hallway below; the sounds of a brief struggle was followed by a rush of many feet up the broad stairs.

Alarmed, the Turks gathered together, drew their weapons, and prepared for a conflict.

It did not seem possible, and yet they feared that they were surprised; although how careful, cautious Skipton Pasha, on guard below, could have allowed an enemy to steal upon him unawares was a mystery.

Not long was the suspense; through the open doors came a host of Montenegrin soldiers, led by Lauderdale, the young prince and—the Scarlet Captain!

The Turks could hardly believe their eyes. Here, in full health was the man whom they had fully believed to have perished in the ruins of the old hut.

The presence of Skipton Pasha in front of the Montenegrin host, evidently not a prisoner, for he was fully armed, partially explained the mystery.

The Englishman had been false to the trust reposed in him, and had not only neglected to kill the prisoner, but had connived at his escape.

A scream of joy came from the lips of the countess as she beheld the rescuing host—a scream re-echoed by her foster-sister, Alexina.

For a moment the renegade stared like a man stricken into stone; but when his eyes fell upon Skipton Pasha, his rage knew no bounds.

"Dog of an Englishman, you have betrayed me! In hell seek thy reward!" and with the word, leveling his already cocked revolver at Skipton, he essayed to pull the trigger; but the adventurer was prepared for the action; his pistol was in his hand and ready. He fired on the instant before Ismail Bey could discharge his weapon.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CATHERINE'S DECISION.

IT was a fatal shot!

Full in the broad chest of the renegade the bullet struck, and straight a passage the leaden missile cut to the bold heart, while Ismail's pistol exploded harmlessly in the air, the ball passing high over the heads of the Montenegrans.

For a moment Ismail stood still as a statue, and as erect, and all believed that he had escaped unhurt; then he pressed his hand convulsively to his breast, staggered and sunk down, all in a heap, dead; the ball had cut the heart in twain and life had ceased almost on the instant, but the great nervous energies of the man had sufficed to keep him upon his feet for a moment, as though by the mere strength of his indomitable will he could defy and set at naught the power of the great peacemaker, grim death.

"It was his life or mine!" Skipton exclaimed, sullenly, as if in excuse for the act, "and life is as sweet to me as to any man!"

"Throw down your arms! You are outnumbered ten to one!" the Scarlet Captain cried.

The Turks, dismayed and cowed by the sudden death of their leader, did not attempt to resist. And while the Montenegrins were busy receiving their arms the two ladies greeted their rescuers.

A little apart from the rest stood Catherine and the Montenegrin leader.

"Again you have saved me!" she murmured, with beaming eyes.

"A lucky chance; Heaven seems to favor me," he replied.

"It is fate," and as the countess spoke there was a look in her dark eyes—a peculiar, joyous light which he had never seen there before.

"And now, lady, that you are again free to go where you list, had you not better seek shelter in some fortified town, where you will be safe from all such attacks as this one to-night? The heiress of Scutari is a tempting prize and there's many an adventurer who might attempt to carry out the plan which cost this renegade his life."

"And where go you?" Catherine asked, with evident timidity.

"Back to our fortified camp near Dulcigno, where Montenegro in the future will keep an army of observation to watch the Turks. We are not yet at the end of this struggle, for, if I read the signs aright, Europe is on the eve of a general war. Turkey cannot yield and in time Russia must advance. War must soon come

The Scarlet Captain.

between the two and probably other powers may be drawn in."

"And can I not go there, too?" the countess asked, appealingly.

"Why not seek the comforts some large city affords?" the soldier asked, in astonishment.

"Is it not a wife's duty to follow her husband?" and as she spoke, in her soft, expressive eyes the Scarlet Captain read a world of meaning.

"True; I am your husband, but you forgot the conditions you imposed."

"Yes, I do forget them, and do you forget them, too?" she answered, softly.

"But, you are a rich heiress, the Countess of Scutari, and an humble soldier like myself—"

She interrupted him.

"You told me that you would be loved for yourself alone. Be satisfied then; the once proud countess has changed into the loving wife. I will cast aside my rank if it offends you and be content to be the humble wife of the simple soldier, whose name even I do not know. Can I say more?"

"No, Catherine," and the rich voice of the soldier was full of emotion; "with thankfulness I accept the gift which Heaven has given me. As the unknown soldier I married you and as the unknown soldier I have won your love; my cup of joy is full."

One of the Montenegrans approached the Scarlet Captain and, saluting respectfully, asked:

"What disposition shall be made of the prisoners, your highness?"

Catherine stared, opening wide her large eyes.

"Your highness!" she exclaimed, in wonder.

The Scarlet Captain smiled.

"The lady does not know me. It is the Countess of Scutari; pray introduce me in due form, colonel," he said, gravely.

The officer did not exactly understand it, but perceiving that the speaker was in earnest, proceeded to do as he was bid.

"Countess, allow me to have the pleasure of presenting to you his royal highness, Nicholas, Prince of Montenegro."

The mystery was explained at last; the Scarlet Captain was the young and heroic Montenegrin prince in person!

"Convey the prisoners to our camp. We must make due complaint in regard to the violation of the truce, and show to all the world that we were not the first to break faith."

The officer departed.

"But the young prince of Montenegro?" Catherine asked.

"My brother—a bright lad who willingly consented to aid me to keep up the deception, for, Catherine, I should have always doubted your love if I had won you as the Prince of Montenegro."

The wonderful escape of the prince from his captivity in the old hut, and how he managed to induce Skipton Pasha to prove recreant to his colors, is soon told.

The Englishman guessed at the time of the capture that the unknown Montenegrin was the prince, for the soldier who had been mortally wounded, the prince's orderly, with his dying breath called out:

"Save Prince Nicholas! His horse is down!"

This gave Skipton a clew which he pondered over, but kept the matter to himself.

And then, when the renegade urged him so eagerly to undertake the task of slaying the prisoner, he consented, so that he might aid the prince to escape. To slay the head of the royal house of Montenegro was something too much for the Englishman.

And on entering the old hut he unbound the captive and told him plumply who he supposed him to be.

The prince did not deny his identity.

"To murder a prince is a cut above me," the blunt Englishman said; "but if I let you escape, why, it will cost me my commission in the Turkish service, and my head, too, if I am not careful to get out of the way."

"Let me go free, and name your price!" the prince had replied.

"No; I won't bargain with a man for his life; but as soon as I can I will get inside the Montenegrin lines, and you can do the best you can for me."

Gladly the captive acceded.

Through the open window in the rear the Montenegrin fled. Skipton set the house on fire to cover the escape, and cutting a gash in his leg daubed his saber with the blood, and the groans of pain which had reached the ears of the Turks had come from his own lips. The rest the reader knows.

Lauderdale, bringing up the Montenegrin troops in hot haste, encountered the fleeing prince and had hurried on to the castle, arriving just in the nick of time.

Skipton had posted no guard, expecting to be surprised, and so an easy entrance was obtained.

Five thousand English pounds the late Bashi Bazouk officer received from the grateful

prince, and then he hurried home to his native land in hot haste to enjoy his fortune.

Following her friend's example, Alexina soon blessed the American with her hand.

Our story now is ended.

We have related a romantic episode connected with the life of the Prince of Montenegro not generally known to the world, and if any of our readers take an interest in the fortunes of one of the bravest and best princes in Europe, let them scan the war news from the Old World, now daily given in our journals.

In 1877, as in 1876, the period of which we have written, the able Montenegrin leader has beaten the Turks at all points, fighting at tremendous odds, too, 60,000 Moslems against 10,000 Montenegrans.

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